

Social Factors Involved in Second Language Learning: A Case Study from the Pacific Campus, Universidad de Costa Rica

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Abstract

This article presents the results obtained from an investigation carried out with students enrolled in the English Teaching Major from the Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica. The investigation is based on a case study supported by the qualitative paradigm. The main objective is to explore different social conditions that influence the effective learning of a second language. The analysis and interpretation of the data was done according to the strengths and limitations found. Through this study, factors such as motivation, cultural background and economic status have proven to be crucial in the language acquisition process of these students.

Key words: language learning, English, social factors, bilingualism, Puntarenas

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación con estudiantes de la carrera de Enseñanza del Inglés de la Sede del Pacífico de la Universidad de Costa Rica, basada en un estudio de casos y apoyada en el paradigma cualitativo. El objetivo principal es explorar diferentes condiciones sociales que influyen en el aprendizaje efectivo de un segundo idioma. El análisis e interpretación de datos se realizaron de acuerdo con las fortalezas y limitaciones halladas. Con base en este estudio se ha demostrado que factores como la motivación y el contexto cultural y económico son cruciales en el proceso de adquisición de la lengua de estos estudiantes.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje de lenguas, inglés, factores sociales, bilingüismo, Puntarenas

Introduction

The Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica offers the English Teaching Major since the year 2002. To this day, there are 110 active students not only from the Pacific area but from different regions of the country as well.

It has caught the researchers' attention the fact that many of their students present difficulties at the time to develop the necessary linguistic abilities to succeed in the acquisition of the language. Considering their social background and their education history, it has been intended to determine whereas these interfere at the time to learn English. It has also been of the researchers' interest to detect how their motivation is affected by these and other factors, influencing their language learning process.

The fact that motivation may either hinder or enhance the language acquisition process has been considered throughout this work. As Mora, Trejo and Roux (2010) claim through the words of Gardner (1985) "the higher the desire to want to belong to a particular language speaking community, the more motivated students were to learn a second language, and therefore, more likely to learn it successfully." (p. 2). Taking this in consideration, is these students' desire big enough to overcome social factors that may interfere in the acquisition of the English language? Does this affect their motivation during the process? These questions are to be responded during this inquiry.

Review of Literature

When talking about second or foreign language teaching there are many aspects that should be considered. Such is the case of motivation, gender, age, attitude, culture, economical aspects, among others. These, as well as many other aspects, will determine the way in which an individual assimilates and develops all the linguistic skills that he/she needs to learn in a new language. Many researchers, especially language teachers, have dedicated time and resources to study this phenomenon. For example, Luke Prodromou in 1992 decides to study cross-cultural factors in language learning in order to understand the importance of aspects related to bicultural teaching, the cultural context of the lesson, students' perceptions, among others. He concluded that the knowledge of the target culture is an important part of the language learning process since this is going to sheer the intrinsic pleasure in discovering more about a new culture.

MehrdadRezaee, from Azad University, Iran, studies in 2011 the social and the cultural aspects of L2/FL and the combination which makes the sociocultural aspects of language learning and teaching. The idea here is basically to understand, once again, the connection that exists between social factors and language learning. By means of this study the author concludes that in order to learn or teach another language, even though it is necessary to take into consideration elements such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, among others, it is extremely advisable to take socio cultural aspects into account as well. According

to Rezaee, there are social or cultural aspects in one language which might be completely different, or totally opposite from the things in one's own language or even absent, this is one of the reasons why cultural aspects should be taught.

Reza Gholami from the University of Putra in Malaysia in the year 2012 investigated the social context as an indirect trigger in EFL contexts. In this study, the author tries to understand the value of the social context and the role it plays in language learning. According to Gholami, the social context is believed to have an influence on students' attitude and motivation by providing learning opportunities that will enhance learners' outcomes. Based on this, it is understood that students acquire a language by using social interaction with speakers of that language. However, according to the researcher, the significance of the social context is usually underestimated in many countries.

On the other hand, Bilal Genc and Erdogan Bada from Çukurova University in Turkey conducted a study in 2005 in order to investigate the relationship that exists between culture in language learning and teaching. In this study, they used the participation of different students of the ELT department to determine this students' opinion regarding the effect of the culture class that they attended. By doing so, they could conclude that a culture class is significantly beneficial in terms of language skills, raising cultural awareness, changing attitudes towards native and target societies, and contributing to the teaching profession. So, cultural instruction helps language students to improve their proficiency in the target language.

Regarding the influence of the students' cultural background, Merce` Bernaus, Anne-Marie Masgoret, Robert Gardner and Edith Reyes from the University of Barcelona conducted a study in 2004 in which they intended to understand the effect of the cultural background of immigrant children in their language learning process. They worked with 114 students, aged 12 to 16; they all answered a questionnaire based on Gardener's Attitude- Motivation Test Battery in which they assessed their attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards language learning. At the end of this study, it was concluded that there were few differences attributable to the cultural background.

Finally, when it comes to motivation and its role in second and foreign language learning, Masanori Matsumoto, from Bond University, Australia conducts a study related to motivational changes and their affecting factors among students from different cultural backgrounds. The author worked with 140 students who were learning foreign languages in Australia in order to see if their learning experiences in a 12 week course changed their motivational intensity and their perceptions of classroom factors affecting their motivation. The researcher also tried to detect differences among the students from four different cultural backgrounds. This study concluded that the culture of the educational environment when the second language learning occurs, has some effect whether positive or negative on the learners' motivation. Also, it was observed that the distance between learners' own language and the target language has a positive effect in L2 learning process. However, based on this study it was possible to say that the relationship between learners' cultural background and their motivational traits

has been found to be more complex than what it has been believed. According to the author, students' motivational intensity can be enhanced or weakened based on how they perceive daily learning events and the variables in a learning context they stress as motivators.

Language acquisition

According to Archibald as mentioned in O'Grady (1997), the field of second language acquisition research investigates how people attain proficiency in a language which is not their first or mother tongue. The study of second language acquisition, according to Archibald has been carried out from different perspectives and points of view. At the beginning, it was basically pedagogical, the idea was to improve language teaching, after that, psychology and linguistics developed a great interest in studying this phenomenon.

According to different studies, second language acquisition has a difference based on a series of factors that will either strengthen or weaken it. Among those factors it is possible to mention: age, socioeconomical context, linguistic background, affective factors and cognitive factors.

Outcomes in second language learning can be mainly influenced by two common individual learner's differences such as age and social background. The first is usually related to a common belief that says that the younger a person begins being trained in a second language the better; in this sense Saddeghi (2013) agrees that the starting age has an effect on the rate of acquisition and the ultimate level of achievement.

Age

There are two basic different views regarding the age issue according to Saddeghi (2013). He claims that children are in all aspects more efficient and effective second language learners than adults and adolescents; on the other hand, he establishes that adults are in all aspects more efficient and effective second language learners than children. Other authors such as Khalifa (2012) supports the position that age affects EFL learning because early exposure to language instructions constantly resulted in better performance. In this same way of thinking he cites Snow (1993) and Taylor (1990) who performed studies that showed that the earlier the first language learning, the better the second language general fluency, and they concluded that the performance of foreign language was better in students who started learning English at an earlier age (5 or 6 years old).

An old saying claims that "It's hard to teach new tricks to an old dog" or "An old parrot doesn't learn how to speak". It seems that there are certain reasons that support this common belief. According to Archibald, as mentioned in O'Grady (1997), people start learning a second or foreign language at different

points in their lives. Then, there is a concept that can not be taken apart in this idea, the critical period hypothesis which O'Grady points out as one of the most intriguing issues in the study of language acquisition since it considers that linguistics development is possible if the individuals are exposed to language during a particular time frame. Researchers consider that phonological as well as grammatical aspects can be compromised if the language learner does not start his/her linguistic instruction at an early age.

Socioeconomical Context

Not less important than age is the social background in which learners are constantly involved while learning a second language, that is because learning occurs in a variety of contexts. According to Williams and Burden (1997) quoted by Pishghadam (2011) the impact of context on learning a language is considerable because the learning environments will enable individuals to learn how to learn and to develop as fully integrated learners. Learner's access to different cultural goods such as Internet, computers, pictures, paintings, books and dictionaries (Cultural capital), and learners' relationships with teachers, parents, siblings, and peers (Social capital) may have a profound influence upon whether, what and how any individual learns a language.

In the field of education, it is important to point out that society plays an important role in the process of second language learning. Pishghadam (2011) agrees that there is a consensus among researchers on the importance of recognizing the structure of relations among social and educational institutions by examining how individuals' different social and cultural experiences affect their educational outcomes. For that reason, English language instructors have to be alert and stop failing to support a practice described by Pishghadam (2011) because the educational system tends to reinforce the social inequalities inherent in society by failing to consider the different amounts of cultural and linguistic competence possessed by different learners with different social backgrounds; so teachers need to recognize that language instruction cannot be understood apart from social class.

Social context surrounds language learners in many different forms, Pishghadam (2011) establishes that social capital might include: number of close friends, presence of two parents at home, number of siblings, extracurricular activities, church attendance, parent knowledge of children's friends, parent's employment, parent monitoring and involvement in education. All these sources are in charge of providing the necessary input they might need in their academic achievement. In this sense, Pishghadam (2011) suggests that those learners who possess more cultural goods and have access to more social network of friends and institutions can guarantee more success in education. He also points out that therefore, it is fair to say that children of families with more social and cultural capital are more successful in education, which might be "reproduced" in the successive generations of the children. Of course, this

“reproduction” can lead to the transmission of social inequality in society, hindering the educational and life changes of poor families’ children.

For instance, Pishghadam (2011) considers that one important issue which has been examined by researchers in the field of language learning is the relationship between social class, success and different capitals learners possess. In this same position, it has been said that ESL students may present different degrees of eagerness to learn English depending on the cultural and social background they have been exposed to, which is supported by Pavlenko (2002) cited by Pishghadam (2011) when he states that the social context is directly involved in setting positive or negative conditions for L2 learning.

Arikan (2011) explains how it has been shown that students with higher socio-economic status demonstrate higher academic achievement and enroll in elite universities more than their lower income peers. As can be seen, people with good salaries can afford educational expenses for them and for their kids. It has been shown by Arikan (2011) that social class, housing, and access to resources have considerable impact on acquisition of value systems as much as on academic achievement.

Finally, Marks (2013) highlights that cognitive ability is a more powerful influence than socioeconomic background for educational outcomes, and that in addition to its indirect effects through education, it has a direct effect on occupation and earnings. Its effects cannot be dismissed as simply another aspect of socioeconomic background, nor do the usual criticisms of ‘cognitive ability’ apply. The declining effects for socioeconomic background and the importance of cognitive ability support several of the contentions of modernization theory.

Linguistic Background

Undoubtedly, the native language plays an important role in the acquisition of an L2 (second language). Its influence during the learning process can be either positive or negative. That is to say, when both languages present similar characteristics, it might be viewed as advantageous in the learning process since it permits students to make associations that will facilitate the development of linguistic structures whereas different language patterns will have the opposite effect, interfering in the acquisition process; this is known as the Native Language Effect. Regarding this, Brown (2001) claims that: “The native language of learners exerts a strong influence on the acquisition of the target language system. While the native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient.” (p. 66). Undoubtedly, the Native Language Effect is present during the learning process until the learner has reached a competent level of internalization of the language, at this point the degree of interference has lowered.

It is the teacher’s role to guide the learner into the positive path and help him/her minimize the negative interference of the L1 (first language) “(...) every

successful learner will hold on to the facilitating effects of the native language and discard the interference.” (Brown, 2001, p. 66).

Hence, the most exposure to the target language a learner has throughout his/her life, the most likely he/she will be to succeed in the linguistic process and to understand the facilitating effects of the L1. Aware of this reality, Costa Rican public education system includes English teaching in its National Syllabus for schools and high schools. Acuña et al (2010) make reference to the first results of the *Costa Rica Multilingüe* program, which reveal that 65% of high school graduates present a basic level of English competence (A1), the majority of this percentage being from the Central Valley. As part of their study, Acuña et al (2010) confirm that aspects such as a long English instruction as well as the individual academic quality imply better English competence; in other words, if a student receives several years of English and is immersed in a suitable environment that would allow learning to occur, he/she would therefore have a higher linguistic level of competence in the target language.

How Does the Social Context Motivate or Influence People in the Learning Process of a Foreign Language?

If language and culture are related and one encourages or transmits the other and vice versa, it is necessary to study the place in which both of them interact and this is without a doubt, the social context. Gholami (2012) establishes that the social context is believed to influence attitude and motivation. Both aspects are strictly necessary when trying to learn another language. The context, as established by Gholami (2012), provides learning opportunities which give rise to learner’s outcomes. Students learn and acquire a language by means of social interaction; however, sometimes, as it is stated by Gholami, the significance of the social context is mostly ignored in EFL countries since their own social context is missing. The author also states that students of a foreign language acquire it by means of social interaction. However, for some people, the significance of the social context is mostly ignored or underestimated in most EFL countries. Therefore, the final result of the learning is not satisfactory.

Also, Gholami (2012) states that language learning takes place in a social context which, according to her, shapes learning in two ways. The context as is stated by this author will influence learners’ motivation. Also, there are two possible learning opportunities, formal and informal ones, which are influenced by the social context as well.

Another relevant aspect to be considered when trying to understand the relevance of the social context in the language learning process is the attitude. Most of the times, the attitude that a learner processes either to a target language or to a target culture will influence the way in which he or she develops his/her linguistic abilities. Actually, according to Gholami (2012), attitudes of the learner towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context play an important role in succeeding or failing to learn a language. Gardner

(1985) as mentioned in Gholami (2012) considers that there are two kinds of attitudes: the attitudes towards the people who speak the target language and attitudes towards the practical use to which the learner assumes he or she can learn. According to him, attitudes do not have direct influence on learning, but they lead to motivation, which does.

Sometimes, because of different types of attitudes, a person might decide to study a language or not. For instance, if a person has a positive attitude towards English or the culture in which it is spoken, this person might be motivated to study it. On the contrary, if there is a negative attitude towards the language per se or towards the cultures or countries in which it is spoken, then the motivation will decrease. This is supported by Gholami (2012) when considering that the social context leads to attitudes which appear in learners as motivation that connect with other personal characteristics. Also, Matsumoto (2012) points out that based on the Schumann's Acculturation Model (1986) it is possible to say that the social factors between the learners' and target cultures play an important role to determine the level of L2 acquisition.

On this very same idea, Chizwick and Miller (2005) as mentioned by Matsumoto (2012) insisted that the distance between the American culture and the immigrant predicts the level of success/failure in acquiring English proficiency. In this case, it is possible to say that the closer two cultures are or at least if there is a good attitude towards a specific culture, the opportunities to learn the language that is spoken in that culture would increase. Viskari (2005) talks about linguistic attitudes. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993: 9), as quoted by Viskari (2005) define these attitudes as "any attitudinal variables that might be implicated in the language-learning context". According to them, there are two different types of language attitudes: attitudes towards learning the foreign language, and attitudes towards the foreign language community. The attitudes towards learning a foreign language, as presented by Viskari (2005), have been shown to relate to other factors, for example age and gender. In this case, Gardner (1985) as presented by Viskari reports that studies have indicated that girls tend to demonstrate more positive attitudes than boys towards learning foreign languages, and that attitudes become less positive with age. On the other hand, according to this author, there is a type of association between attitudes towards learning a foreign language and achievement in that language.

Methodology

Participants

This study considered a total of 56 participants both males and females, most of them women. All of the participants are students of I and II year of the English Teaching Major at the Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica. The students come from different places of Costa Rica such as Miramar, Orotona, Puntarenas, Esparza, San Ramón, San Vito, Cóbano, Pérez Zeledón, among

others and they are all between 17 and 50 years old; however, most of them are between 17 and 23 years old. The majority of the participants started having contact with the target language (English) between ages 16 and 20. They are all regular full time students who are taking from 8 to 24 credits at the University. Finally, it is important to mention that almost all of the participants possess some type of scholarship provided by the University of Costa Rica. Actually, more than 50% of them have a scholarship type eleven, what means that their economic situation is very specific. In other words, this is a group of students that has a very low economical income in their homes.

Setting

This study was conducted in the Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica, which is located in the Province of Puntarenas. This institution offers nine different majors; one of them is the English Teaching Major which has been decentralized from the Rodrigo Facio Campussince the year 2009. The main philosophy of all the courses from this educational curriculum is to promote an environment of research, reflection, dialogue and analysis about all the contents established in the courses' syllabus. Professors from the career are professionally well specialized in the field of teaching English as a foreign language and have plenty of experience in the education area. Since there are not a lot of students enrolled in each of the courses, professors usually give personalized attention to their students' needs.

Instrument

The instrument used was based on the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery by Gardner (2004). It was divided in three parts: personal and academic information, 32 statements with a scale of agreement (strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree) as well as a five-option question about the statement they feel more identified with in relation to the difficulties faced at the time to learn a second language, and 12 rating questions regarding their motivation during the acquisition process of an L2.

In order to avoid comprehension problems, the instrument was applied in Spanish since participants are beginners in the study of the English language.

Procedure

The participants were asked to fill out the instrument during the 14th week of class. The students filled out the form individually during regular class time. The teacher in charge of the groups at the moment to apply the instrument facilitated a space for the researchers to pass the form.

Results and Analysis

To interpret the results of this study, the information has been grouped into three main sections: social aspects (age, socio-economical context and linguistic background), parental role and relationship between social context and students' motivation.

Social Aspects

Role of Age and the Influence of the Socioeconomic Context

Among the features that were measured with all the participants was the age factor. It was demonstrated that the range ages from all the participants goes from students who are 17 years old to students who are 27 years old (except for one, who is 50 years old), this is related to the fact that almost all the participants have had the same language learning chances towards English acquisition. It was revealed that almost none of the participants had the chance to start studying English before formal instruction in schools and high school began. In fact, most of the participants of this study began studying English in ages between 16 and 20. This can be attributed to the places where they come from. Table 1 shows that students enrolled in the English Teaching Major from the Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica, come from rural areas, where private language institutions are not common, and also in some of those areas, such as Parrita, English language instruction did not begin in primary school as in other areas of the same province like El Roble.

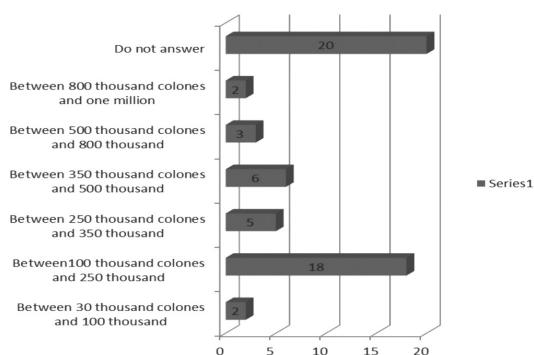
Table 1
Place of origin of the participants from the study

Places where participants come from	Amount of students
Atenas	1
Barranca	4
Chomes	1
Cóbano	1
Coronado	1
El Roble	4
Esparza	8
Fray Casiano	1
Jacó	1
Jireth	1
Limón	1

Miramar	4
Orotina	5
Palmares	2
Paquera	2
Parrita	2
Perez Zeledón	1
Puntarenas	4
Puriscal	1
San Carlos	1
San José	1
San Mateo	1
San Ramón	5
San Vito	1
Sardinal	1
Zarcero	1

Similarly, their social status has not given learners economic opportunities to pay for extracurricular tuition, their current home monthly income reveals that fact as it is appreciated in graph 1.

Graph 1
Home monthly income from the participants of the study



For the purpose of this study it was vital to ask the participants about their socioeconomic status. Almost 65% of them possess scholarship type eleven, which can be defined as the economic support that the University of Costa Rica gives to students that receive very low home monthly income in their nuclear family. This situation is due to the fact that the places where the participants come from have fishing as one of their most important economic activities to live and only one member of their families work because of lack of job opportunities.

As can be seen in the previous graph, the amount of money that they receive monthly is enough only to buy food and pay the bills for public services. Almost half of the participants' families earn between 100 thousand colones and 250 thousand colones per month, which leads to a new difficult situation for them because they cannot have access to lots of technological devices at home. However, the participants mentioned that they use web resources to study English because they can have free access to internet in the campus.

When learners were asked about the reasons why they have chosen this Major, they said that learning a second language is something really important for their future, and since they did not have the possibility to master this language at a very young age, they feel the necessity to study and acquire this target language now that they are young adults.

Unfortunately, the findings from the instrument reflected that the family economic environment has made few of them want to quit studying. This situation occurs mainly among the participants that have scholarship number ten or less, that means that they do not receive money from the University to pay for their travel expenses, photocopies or to buy food.

When consulted, they affirmed that their family economic situation makes them want to quit college since they cannot afford their expenses, including housing, which is vital in the sense that most students come from places far from the zone where the campus is located.

On the other hand, social inequalities from society are encouraging them to finish their Major in order to have better opportunities than their parents. When asked about the reason why they enrolled this Major, it was discovered that 60% of them wants to finish in order to get a good job. Social disadvantages from their community have helped them visualize the world in a realistic way. That is because it was also tested that they understand that if they are professionals, they can earn good salaries, and that English opens a lot of doors in their future labor field.

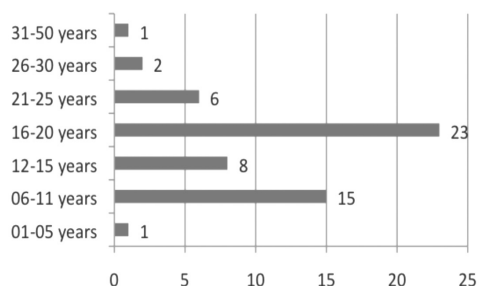
It is also reflected that among the participants there are not remarkable differences in social classes. All of them have the same status, so there are no distinctions between all students in the class, and they recognize that the teacher treats them the same way, especially because all them have access to all the technological equipment that the University offers them, such as computers, books, online resources, library access and a language lab access, too.

Linguistic Background

The influence the native language has in learners is related, in some level, with the age in which a person starts his/her exposure to another language. This will influence the level in which he/she will acquire it or learn it. Also, the influence of the native language plays an important role in the way a person can master a second or foreign language.

To illustrate this, it might be important to take a look at how old the participants were at the moment they started to study English.

Graph 2
Age in which students start to study English



In the graph above, it is possible to observe that most of the participants of this study began studying English between ages 16 and 20. There is a group, however, that started having contact with the target language between ages 6 and 11 which means that they began to study English during their elementary school years. This situation can be beneficial for these students since, according to Saddeghi (2013), children are in all aspects more efficient and effective second language learners than adults and adolescents. Based on other authors such as Khalifa (2012), age affects EFL learning because, according to him, early exposure to language instructions constantly results in better performance. More than 70% of the participants of this study began their English language training being twelve or older. That means, they started having contact with the target language during their high school years or even older. There is an isolated case, though, of a student who started having contact with English when he/she was between 0 and 5 years old. It is easy to assume that this person probably attended a private institution at that age or his/her parents instructed him/her. Under these circumstances, it can be said that most of the students that participated in this study have been strongly influenced by their native language (Spanish), then, the learning process of any other language, English in this case, can be compromised or influenced negatively. It is not the same for a person who started having contact with a target language at an early age such as 3 or 4 than for a person who does it being 20 or more than 30 years old. The participants themselves seem to think that indeed, the fact that they did not take English in school or high school is going to affect their learning process in a way. Once again, the earlier a person begins being in contact with a target language, the easier would be for this individual to master it.

Some of the aspects that might demonstrate the influence of the native language in the participants of the study are the use of “Spanish like” structures some of them make use of. Also, some of the pronunciation patterns in these students are highly influenced by their native language. All of these aspects have been observed by the teachers that have contact with the participants of the study.

Parental Role

Needless to say, the support one receives from their peers or relatives is crucial at the time to face any challenge. The same way occurs when learning another language. As Pishghadam (2011) claims, aspects such as the presence of two parents at home, parent monitoring and their involvement in education are sources in charge of providing the necessary input they might need in their academic achievement. Therefore, questions regarding these sources were included in the instrument.

About this matter, the results are highly positive. Participants express that their parents support them in their learning process since they consider important to know the language. Despite the fact that in most cases, they do not count with the enough economic resources to help them, the motivation they provide encourages them during the process; otherwise, the obstacles to overcome will be higher.

Relationship between the Context and Students' Motivation and Attitude towards the Language

Most of the students wish they could speak other languages perfectly. This shows that they have some sort of motivation either intrinsic or extrinsic towards foreign languages. Having this type of interest may be highly beneficial for the students to master the target language they are being exposed to at the moment (English).

Other of the statements the students responded to was in relation to their interest in learning other languages which, as it was showed, was quite high. In this case, students are asked about their interest in learning English specifically. Most of them agreed with the statement "*learning English is great*", that shows that their attitude towards this language is very favorable. And as Archibald (1997) said, emotions affect how successful a second language learner is. The attitude in many cases is crucial to guarantee successful learning. Actually, according to Ghalami (2012), attitudes of the learner towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context play an important role in succeeding or failing to learn a language. In this specific case it is possible to understand that there is a good welcoming attitude towards the English language, most of the students think it is great to learn it.

Regarding the participants' attitudes towards the target culture, which in this case is the one composed by native speakers of English; it is more than obvious that there is a good reception. Students like to meet people who speak other languages; this also reinforces the fact presented previously about wanting to speak other languages. Besides this, they perceive English speakers as sociable and nice; this reveals that there is a positive attitude towards English native speakers. Having this positive attitude might increase students' possibilities of mastering the target language more easily.

Based on the answers provided, one can deduce that students feel motivated in their English classes, something they manifested by agreeing completely to statements such as *"I really enjoy to learn English"* and *"I would rather spend more time in my English class and less in other classes"*. Similarly, the subjects of this study disagreed with statements such as *"I don't like English classes"* and *"my English classes are boring"*. Undoubtedly, this perception of the students towards their English lessons is highly optimistic since it reflects a positive attitude towards the classes, which at the same time, facilitates the learning process in spite of the problems they might face in their social environment. In addition to this, the participants affirmed they possess a positive attitude towards their teachers, which increases their willingness to learn and overcome academic difficulties.

Matsumoto (2012) points out that according to Schumann's Acculturation Model (1986) it is possible to say that the social factors between the learner and target cultures play an important role to determine the level of L2 acquisition. In general, it seems that there is an open reception towards the target language in terms of interest and attitude. This is definitely not a problem students have to deal with when learning the target language. Even though age, money limitations and the linguistic background may interfere in the process, students overcome the obstacles and get to feel motivated because they realize that by mastering the language they will also overcome the social factors that have endangered the process.

Conclusions

Although students did not start to learn English during their childhood time, they have a positive attitude towards language learning which undoubtedly benefits language acquisition to take place, they feel really motivated to learn the language and reach their goal.

Fifteen years ago, when the participants of the study were kids, private language institutions were not popular and they simply did not exist in those rural places. Also, the government had not given the importance of mastering English in that time either. So, it was very difficult for them to move to the capital city of the country to receive such instruction. For instance, it is clearly seen how the economic situation kept off students from previous access to have the opportunity to acquire the language when they were kids. Furthermore, due to the financial problems they have gone through, they feel motivated to scope their purpose and master the target language they decided to be taught.

Similarly, one of the most relevant problems that was detected, as expressed by the students, is the lack of bases they have from school and high school regarding English instruction. They actually consider this the biggest issue they have to deal with in this moment. It seems illogical, this is a population that should have received English lessons for eleven entire years or more in case of technical high schools, but still they do not seem to have a great amount of knowledge in this area.

It is probable also, that if the University does not give them money from the scholarship type eleven, more than half of the students from the Major will not have the money they need to go to Puntarenas to study or to rent an apartment near the campus. They really use that money to pay for their expenses because it is impossible for their parents to do so. However, the fact that they receive moral support from their parents increases their potential and willingness to learn. This is highly important because it helps break the cycle of poverty in which people with low income and few education possibilities are forced to live.

It seems that if the University does not help them economically, students from the English Teaching Major would not have the possibility to finish their studies, they could start, but it would be very difficult for them to finish. In addition to this, thanks to their academic life, they have good access to technology because the University provides them with all the tools they need to master the target language; hence, their possibilities to succeed increase.

A good point that this study showed, was the fact that socioeconomic factors have created a clear resolution in students' minds, because they feel very motivated to really learn the language, finish their studies and get a good job to improve their economic situation.

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