

# Positive Oral Encouragement in the EFL Classroom, A Case Study through Action Research

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## Abstract

This article reflects upon the usage of oral encouragement as an extrinsic affective strategy in an English for specific purposes course for chemists and chemistry students in a university setting. Facilitated by action research as a case study, this paper reports on how oral encouragement increases motivation and thus, oral participation in the classroom for a low-intermediate student. As a side effect, oral encouragement in the form of praise also fostered the student's self-confidence. Finally, it was found that classroom management played an important role along with oral encouragement and self-confidence in order to increase oral participation.

**Key words:** oral encouragement, action research, affective variables, English for specific purposes, motivation, oral production

## Resumen

Este artículo discute la aplicación del estímulo oral como una estrategia afectiva y emocional en una clase de inglés para fines específicos para estudiantes universitarios en un ambiente académico. Utilizando la técnica de la investigación en acción sobre un estudio de caso, se explica cómo el estímulo oral aumenta la motivación, y con ella, la participación oral en un estudiante de nivel intermedio bajo. Como efecto colateral, el estímulo oral como felicitación y alabanza también influyó sobre la autoconfianza del estudiante. Finalmente, se descubrió que el manejo de la clase también tenía una función importante junto al estímulo oral y la autoconfianza para lograr la participación oral.

**Palabras claves:** estímulo oral, investigación en acción, variables afectivas, inglés con fines específicos, motivación, producción oral

## The Problem

One of the Chemistry students for an ESP course, “Manuel,” is a graduated, working chemist with a position of authority. However, his English proficiency is lower than the undergraduate students who are his classmates. During pair or groupwork, he shows reticence to participate in class and to engage in oral activities. In addition to impairing his learning experience, his lack of participation limits the rich contributions he could make to the class as a professional chemist. His classmates and teachers could learn a lot from him, and in the ESP environment, he could help to make classes more meaningful and authentic. In fact, he provided the researchers with some samples of authentic materials from his every day activities as part of the input needed to design an ESP course. In a highly competitive environment such as the field of chemistry, it is normal that scientists keep information to themselves, avoiding many instances where sharing or interaction would be not only useful but necessary. In the specific setting of an ESP course, however, individualistic culture must be addressed appropriately by the teacher in order to create a cooperative, interactive environment.

As Hedge (2000) points out, “Students unused to the demands for speaking in public made by the communicative classroom, even if that ‘public’ is a relatively small number of their peers in groupwork, may be reluctant to speak up through lack of confidence or fear of ‘losing face’ by making mistakes.” (p.290) Thus, this project intends to explore the possibilities of coping with a particular student’s reticence in order to facilitate his oral participation in the classroom. The hypothesis that was proposed holds that by means of overt oral encouragement by the teacher, his class participation would increase. As a side result, it was also expected to foster his self-confidence when speaking in groups or in front of the class. This was sought by using oral encouragement (positive feedback) as a way to motivate “Manuel” and thus, to increase his total participation time and frequency. For this purpose, pairwork and groupwork were key classroom arrangements to promote oral participation and decrease students’ reticence. This is also summarized by Bailey (2005):

One way to overcome [students’] reticence and increase their opportunities to speak is to use pairwork and groupwork. According to Pennington (1995), using pairwork and groupwork can improve learners’ motivation and promote choice, independence, creativity, and realism. (p. 38)

## Importance of Researching This Problem

In addition to determining in the context of a case study the influence of oral encouragement on a student’s motivation and thus on his class participation, as part of any action research project it is required to be able to pinpoint more accurately this low-proficiency student’s problems and obstacles. To an English

teacher and in this case, an ESP instructor, dealing with the different obstacles that the English field's academic and professional culture may be encountered, this has provided valuable experience in order to benefit other students in the future. As a teacher, precious experience and insight have been gained related to the importance of affective variables in the classroom, promoting motivation, and oral participation. Low-proficiency students need more attention and effort on the teacher's part especially in contexts where there are mixed-proficiency levels and the class must be inclusive and enriched by every student's expertise.

This paper's findings, then, have helped the researchers select pairwork and groupwork as the most appropriate classroom method to provide chances for student interaction and participation, especially important for reticent students. As Hedge (2003) suggests,

There is a principle underlying current ELT practice that interaction pushes learners to produce more accurate and appropriate language, which itself provides input for other students. This is one reason why pairwork and groupwork have become common features of contemporary classrooms. (p.13)

Besides pairwork and groupwork, oral encouragement was applied as one of the best strategies so low-proficiency students could increase their oral participation and as an emotional result, their self-confidence as language learners. By stimulating Manuel's participation in class, it was expected that he would increase also his self-confidence, which in turn, would spur his participation in a virtuous circle. The particular focus of the project is presented below.

### **Focus of the Project**

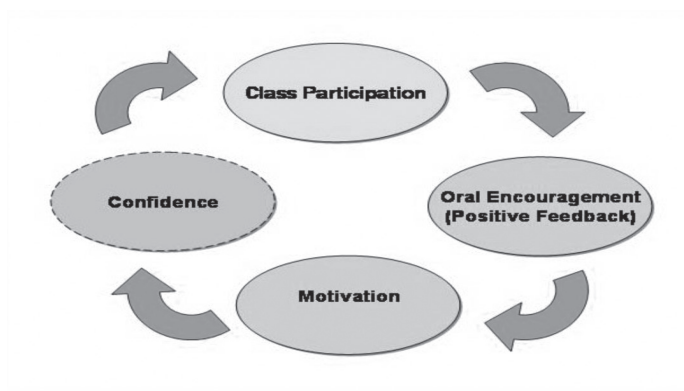
This project will focus on the following aspects: oral encouragement (positive feedback), motivation, and class participation. These three elements are interconnected and as it was said above, constitute a productive cycle. Although other affective variables will be contemplated in the Review of Literature and also included as minor aspects in the observation instruments, the affective variable that will be considered in depth will be motivation. Since class participation can be fostered by the teacher (Hedge, 2003), a positive and active attitude by the teacher as provider of oral encouragement (positive feedback), would help increase Manuel's motivation and as a result, his total time of participation in the classroom during pairwork and groupwork. Also, the frequency of Manuel's participation was expected to increase. Finally, although it will not be analyzed as a key factor, self-confidence will be positively influenced as a language learner and English-speaking professional.

As it will be explained below, the hypothesis of this project is that building Manuel's self-confidence by means of positive feedback would motivate him enough to increase the frequency and total time of his oral participation. This is

corroborated by the qualitative and quantitative effects of oral encouragement on his class participation. To summarize, this Action Research Project is structured around the cycle Positive Feedback-Motivation-Confidence-Class Participation. This can be illustrated in the virtuous cycle shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1**

**Virtuous Cycle: Class Participation, Oral Encouragement. Motivation. (Confidence)**



## Review of Literature

### Classroom participation

Speaking is a basic part of human nature. In the English teaching classroom (either ESL or EFL), speaking is considered one of the four macro skills, along with listening, reading, and writing. Since this is “language generated by the speakers,” it is considered a productive skill (Savignon, 1991 in Bailey, 2005, p.2). Speaking can be defined as “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Florez, 1991 in Bailey, 2005, p.3). This can be linked to communicative competence, that is, “the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge (Savignon, 1991 in Bailey, 2005).

In the communicative language classroom, this implies that speaking activities require the students’ participation in order to exchange information and to engage in the learning experience. On the other hand, in the ESP classroom (part of the spectrum of the ESL or EFL), “speaking... the target language is essential for faster progress” (Lynch, 1996, p.106). Furthermore, “people acquiring second languages seem to learn the components of language through interaction with other people (Bailey, 2005, p.7). For more information on interaction and SLA, see Ellis, 1990; Gass, 1997; and Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991.

The students' oral production in the classroom, also called class participation is therefore, a key aspect in language learning. It "helps instructors see how the students have understood the course material, and it also helps promote further student learning" (CIDR Bulletin, Vol. 4, 2000). As Hedge (2000) states, "learners need practice in producing comprehensible input (Swain, 1985) using all the language resources they have already acquired." Classroom participation can be classified as "learner-learner interaction" (when students take part in pair or groupwork) or "teacher-learner interaction" (Lynch, 1996, p.105).<sup>1</sup>

### **The Communicative Teaching Method**

Student interaction can be promoted by means of methodologies and classroom activities that foster communication in the ESL classroom. With this particular goal in mind, and as a result of teachers' dissatisfaction with the Audio Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching developed mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. It upholds classroom interaction as one of its main tenets for promoting language acquisition. Among the activities that adhere to the Communicative Method, information gap tasks and role-plays can be mentioned. In addition, Communicative Language Teaching uses pairwork and groupwork as organizational features to promote interaction and participation from learners (Bailey, 2005, p.18).

Interaction between students and class participation, however, is subject not only to methodological variables but to affective variables as well. As Cook (2001) points out, "teachers usually have to deal with groups rather than as individuals... however, ultimately language is learnt not by groups, but by individuals... particular features of the learner's personality or mind encourage or inhibit L2 learning" (p.157). Hutchinson & Waters (1987) think that, "the relationship between the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning is, therefore, one of vital importance to the success or otherwise of a language learning experience." (p.48) Because of this, there are different affective variables that need to be taken into consideration in the classroom in order to promote both learning and participation. For the purpose of this paper's research motivation will have a central role as an affective factor in the ESL classroom, but other aspects such as attitude and emotions will be addressed too in this literature review in order to understand better the importance of motivation.

### **Affective Variables in the EFL Classroom**

#### **Motivation**

Motivation has not been considered enough by researchers as an important affective variable in the L2 classroom, as Crookes and Schmidt (1991) point out. "Motivation: Performers with high motivation generally do better in SLA...

acquirers vary with respect to the strength or level of their Affective Filters.” (p.26) For Cook (1996), “Motivation also works in both directions. High motivation is one factor that causes successful learning; in reverse, successful learning causes high motivation.” (p.201) Although a definitive explanation of motivation is still pending, many researchers continually reveal new aspects of it:

In fact, every different psychological perspective of human behavior will come up with a different theory of motivation and thus in general psychology it is not the lack, but rather the abundance of motivation theories that confuses the scene.” (Dornyei, 1996)

Researchers such as Trambly and Gardner (1995), Smit and Dalton (2000), and Noels, Pelletier and Vallerand (2000) have divided motivation into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, depending on the learner and the stage of his/her learning,

Individuals are extrinsically motivated if they behave in certain ways in order to get external rewards or to avoid punishment; intrinsically motivated behaviours are those propelled by internal rewards such as the satisfaction of one’s curiosity, or the joy at the performing a certain activity.” (Noels, Pelletier and Vallerand, 2000)

These two types of motivation must be seen as complementary rather than exclusive, as it will be analyzed later.

### **Integrative motivation**

Integrative motivation was described by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as the need of the learner to communicate and take part of the target language community. For Cook (1995), it “reflects whether the student identifies with the target culture and people in some sense, or rejects them.” For Yokochi (2003), integrative motivation is a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation since the language is being learned “for a specific purpose rather than ‘for fun’”. In fact, “Intrinsic, integrative and extrinsic motivations may not be distinctly separate traits, but may lie along a continuum”. Noels, *et al.* (2000) propose a “self-determination continuum”. According to them, intrinsic motivation consists of three types, IM-knowledge, IM-Accomplishment, and IM-Stimulation (where IM stands for intrinsic motivation).

As a corollary, Smit and Dalton (2000) stated that intrinsic motives “are likely to remain fairly stable over time”, whereas “extrinsic motives, on the other hand, are likely to be more variable over time depending on which external benefit the learner finds important at a given moment.” This is, perhaps, one of the most important differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the long term.

### **Extrinsic motivation**

Research has demonstrated that motivation is not static, but a dynamic process that changes according to the learner social, psychological, and affective needs. For example, Schmidt (1996) found that learners started out being intrinsically motivated, but that there existed a “steady progression with increasing proficiency toward more tangible reasons for studying English and away from purely internally driven motivational support.”

In relation to the second language (L2) classroom, Kambon in his theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in interlanguage development and fossilization of error (2005) stresses some of the typical conditions in SLA that may influence extrinsic motivation: “extrinsic motivational factors such as the teacher, learning materials, curriculum, classroom language, etc., lower the standards and expectations of the student to the point in which they feel that it is not obligatory to leave the L1 comfort zone of familiar words, structure, etc.”<sup>2</sup> According to him, the use of the native language (L1) as a “crutch” in the classroom (mainly in the Foreign Language classroom) can become a practice that de-motivates students and impoverishes their learning even in early stages.

### **Oral encouragement in the language classroom**

#### **Feedback**

As it was mentioned above, when “learner-teacher interaction” occurs, communication serves a pedagogical purpose by providing feedback to the student. Feedback can be defined as “language-related responses to learners’ utterances, upon which the learner is focused and which can be used by the learner to validate or invalidate concepts he or she has about the target language.” (Seliger, 1983, p. 258 in Reigel, 2005, p. 30)

Providing feedback, in fact, is one of the most important roles that teachers have in the ELT communicative classroom:

Another role assumed by several CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) approaches is that of counselor...[this] teacher-counselor is expected to exemplify an effective communicator seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker intention and hearer interpretation, through the use of paraphrase, confirmation, and *feedback*. (Richards and Rogers, 2001, p.168)

Even though feedback can be provided to students by both teachers and peers, this project will focus on teacher feedback. “Feedback should be given by teachers to students, Kohn (1993) argues, ‘It is an essential element of the educational process, because students need information to know if their performance is up to par.’ ” (Reigel, 2005, p.18-19) Its importance as part of the



learning process is undeniable, “Getting feedback from the teacher... in the class enables learners to test [their own learning] hypotheses and refine their developing knowledge of the language system” (Hedge, 2000).

### **Positive and negative feedback**

As provided by the teacher, feedback can be divided into two types, depending on the objectives it serves in the classroom. According to Schachter (1983 in Lynch, 1996), feedback can be both negative or positive (if it expresses either disapproval or approval). In addition it can be classified as implicit (based on clues or signals) or explicit (open correction or confirmation.) Thus, apart from cognitive feedback (about comprehensibility or accuracy of what the learner has said), teachers provide affective feedback (showing approval or disapproval.). (Lynch, 1996, p.117) For the purposes of this project, explicit positive feedback is the main point of interest as the main manner in which the teacher could motivate students in order to promote motivation and thus, oral participation in the classroom.

These two types of feedback, although they may be used in a discretionary manner by the teacher, need to be alternated in order to be effective as means to enhance the students’ learning and motivation: “There is always a need to balance negative feedback on errors with positive feedback on the student’s attempts to produce the language, and this means consideration of affective factors and knowing ‘when to push and when to stop.’” (Hedge, 2000, p.290) Kuo (2003) elaborates on the idea that language teachers should “discern the optimal tension between positive and negative feedback” (in Reigel, 2005), that is, “striking a balance that offers enough encouragement to motivate the learner, but not so much that errors are overlooked.” (p.20)

### **Positive feedback and oral encouragement**

Seliger’s definition of feedback (1983) defines it as “either teacher correction on isolated forms, adjusted ‘foreigner talk’ (as cited in Imai, 1989, p. 17), or conversational responses.” (Reigel, 2005, p. 27) On the other hand, positive feedback in particular may include praise markers as proposed by Vigil and Oller (1976) “such as ‘OK,’ ‘fine,’ ‘good,’ and ‘excellent’ (as cited in Imai, 1989, p. 18), as well as a positive personal response.” (Reigel, 2005, p.27) Praise is defined by Reigel (2005) as “evaluative feedback provided by a speaker, whether teacher or student, of a positive affective nature: indicated by praise markers ‘good,’ ‘great,’ ‘nice,’ and/or all preceding terms plus ‘job’ or ‘work.’ (p.31)

In fact, as Reigel (2005) suggests, it is important to clearly distinguish between positive feedback and “praise” in the classroom. As he points out, “Positive feedback not only has a metalinguistic component (praise) but also a linguistic component (affirmation) and a paralinguistic component (laughter)” (p.32) For



the purposes of this project, Reigel's (2005) extended definition of positive feedback will be used:

**Positive feedback:** Spoken feedback of a positive affective nature. Positive feedback contains:

1. A paralinguistic component, such as "Normal conversational responses that one gives in face-to-face situations. Such responses as uh huh or head nodding convey agreement or that the message has been received and is understood ... can be seen as forms of feedback" (Seliger, 1983, p. 258). Includes laughter and nonverbal cues, as defined.
2. A linguistic component, including the "personal response" (Imai, 1989, p. 17) —a mechanism of interpersonal communication that includes a speaker and hearer; manifested by affirmation as defined.
3. A metalinguistic component, taking the form of evaluative feedback, including praise markers such as "fine," "good," "excellent" (Vigil and Oller, 1976). (p.32)

In other words, this project will consider positive feedback and oral encouragement as equivalents, in order to measure Manuel's class participation response to the teacher's oral encouragement. Examples of the teacher's feedback will be offered in order to comply with Reigel's definition.

### **Positive feedback and confidence**

Thus, the teacher should use positive feedback as a means to help students develop their motivation and confidence. "Confidence is a significant factor for many people in speaking a language, and classroom feedback should be based on maintaining and increasing confidence." (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, p.112) For low-proficiency students such as Manuel, confidence indeed, is one of the most important affective aspects they need to develop during oral tasks, either in pairwork or groupwork: "As with spoken interactions, the confidence factor must influence how feedback is handled. Strengths need highlighting and building on..." (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, p.114). As it was discussed above, this means that positive feedback is related to affective factors, whereas negative or corrective feedback is more related to cognitive and linguistic factors.

## **Action Plan**

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of oral encouragement (positive feedback) on a low-proficiency student's motivation and oral participation.

## Research Question

How can overt oral encouragement increase the motivation and oral participation of a low-proficiency student in the ESP classroom?

## Participants

Since this is a case study, only one low-proficiency student in our ESP class will take part in the project. "Manuel," is a graduate student who has a position of authority at the School of Chemistry. He is 26 years old, and has studied English basically during high school and one year during his major. His current level is low intermediate, with serious difficulties when trying to express orally his opinions and ideas, due to his lack of fluency and continuous struggles in order to be accurate.

## Research Intervention

After carrying out a short literature review on the topic of motivating oral participation, the intervention used consisted of oral encouragement on the part of the teacher, by either asking directly for Manuel's opinion, or by providing supportive and motivating comments such as "Good job," "great," or "excellent." (See Reigel, 2005) Another important aspect investigated was Manuel's expectations regarding how a language teacher is supposed to motivate students.

In this manner, data was collected to note down Manuel's perception of his problems and progress. In addition, checklists were created and used in class as a means to observe and measure Manuel's total participation frequency and time. Finally, these sessions were recorded (in audio) in order to be able to tally his total participation time during each oral activity.

## Steps

- a. One interview prior to class observations (Q1)
- b. Two control class observations
- c. Six observation sessions where oral encouragement was applied by the teacher. These observations included an Observation Checklist (OC) with criteria to be evaluated.
- d. Final interview after observations (Q2)

## Timeline

- a. First Interview: Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>.
- b. Control observations: Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>. and Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>.

- c. Guided observations: Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>. - Oct. 29<sup>th</sup>.
- d. Second Interview: Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>.

### **Resources and Materials**

Since this study took place during a Master's Degree Practicum, in a team-taught fashion, this researcher and his Practicum partner took turns as teacher one every other class. Therefore, when one teacher was providing oral encouragement, the other (assistant teacher) observed and wrote down the necessary information. The assistant had a crucial role as data collector.

Intervention resources consisted basically of oral encouragement in the form of questions, prompting, or positive comments during pair and groupwork (Reigel, 2005.) In addition, two interviews (applied by this researcher), observation checklists, and audio tapes of the observed classes were used to gather the information required. Audio recordings were analyzed in order to tally the number of class interventions by Manuel, as well as his total class participation (speaking) time.

### **Data Collection Process**

#### **Instruments**

Three main instruments were used with the purpose of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative data collected via interviews helped gather valuable subjective information based on Manuel's points of view regarding teaching and motivation before and after the research had taken place. Then, written observation forms allowed both researcher and assistant to follow relevant criteria (basically Manuel's attitude and responses in the classroom during pairwork and groupwork.) In addition, the total participation time of Manuel was recorded and tallied (quantitative amount of effective oral participation.)

- a. Two interviews (one before and one after all observations were done in order to include subjective information related to Manuel's English learning background and expectations about his teacher's role in the classroom.) These were labeled "Q1" and "Q2" respectively.
- b. Class observations (where a checklist with pertinent criteria regarding participation, observable motivation was used.) These forms were labeled "OC."
- c. Audio recordings of classes (to tally quantitative information in regards to frequency and total time of classroom participation.)

These instruments can be found in the Appendices section of this report. The most relevant aspects and points will be addressed in the section dedicated to Analysis of this paper.

## Application of Instruments

Based on the information presented previously in this paper, one personal interview (Q1) was conducted by the researcher prior to any observation. The second interview (Q2) took place once all observations had concluded. Furthermore, for each observation (both control and guided sessions), an observation form (OC) with criteria related to affective variables was used (See Appendix section for details.) These observation forms were filled by either the researcher or his assistant, taking turns as either teacher for that particular class or assistant teacher.

Finally, all observed lessons were recorded in audio in order to tally the total participation time of Manuel, in addition to his participation frequency. These recordings provided the researcher with quantitative criteria in order to measure Manuel's progress along time as result of his higher motivation and thus, his total participation time in pairwork and groupwork.

All the dates for each observation and application of instruments have been presented in the Timeline section of the previous section. This means also that all pertinent information that was gathered during the interviews and observations was processed according to the Timeline. Analysis and conclusions will be part of the process as detailed above.

## Findings and Results

### Interviews and Observations (qualitative information)

The findings of this research will be presented based on the main aspects considered in a virtuous cycle as illustrated in Figure 1; that is, Oral Encouragement, Motivation, Participation, and Self-Confidence. Due to this, qualitative information gathered by means of interviews and class observation (applying checklists) will be offered as complementary support. Questions that dealt specifically with Manuel's opinions regarding the effects of teacher's attitude and management of groupwork activities (including providing positive feedback) upon his motivation when participating in class were among results. In this sense, both interviews can be contrasted and compared based on these questions' contents and Manuel's answers.

This contrast revealed the effects of the teacher's oral encouragement (positive feedback) on Manuel's motivation and its effects on classroom participation. Another important aspect included here is self-confidence, as a side effect of motivation and thus, a facilitator of class participation. Questionnaire 1 (Q1) refers to the questions belonging to the first interview (pre-research), whereas Questionnaire 2 (Q2) labels questions belonging to the second interview (post-research). Besides, (OC) refers to the information collected via Observation Checklists. The complete interview questionnaires and Observation Checklists applied can be found in the Appendices section of this report.

### Teacher's oral encouragement and motivation

There is a stated direct relation between oral encouragement and Manuel's motivation. On Question #4 (Q1): Describe a positive experience that helped you feel more motivated to participate in class, Manuel answers, "When I realize that my ideas are not rejected but accepted. Many times, when the teacher comments on something I said and you think *that what you said was interesting since it motivated the teacher... either complementing or confirming... what I said.*" On the other hand, after the teacher's oral encouragement during the observed sessions, Manuel answers to Question #1 (Q2): What did the teacher do in order to motivate you (to participate)?, "*the teacher used to come to me and ask me for my opinion regarding what my classmates were discussing... If I participated, he generally repeated and emphasized some of my words and congratulated me...*"

This is complemented by information obtained through two other questions. On Question #6 (Q1): How should the teacher motivate students?, Manuel considered that this could be achieved by, "*asking questions to the students, asking them for their opinions, and allowing an equal participation to all as far as possible.*" Later, when he was asked on Question #6 (Q2): Out of the things that the teacher said to you, Which has motivated you the most?, he answers, "*his praise, inviting me to speak more often, and to express my ideas. Sometimes, a simple comment like 'that's interesting,' 'great,' or 'good job' can really make you feel like contributing more to the class... you feel like more demanding on yourself in terms of learning and participating.*"

Finally, two items from the Observation Checklist (OC) illustrate the ways that motivation was present in the classroom. On Question #2 (OC): Does Manuel show motivation during pairwork or groupwork?, the answer in all instances (100%) was unanimous (this will be elaborated further in Section II of this Chapter, Class Records). Regarding the Examples of the teacher's comments, Question #10 (OC): the most frequent utterances by the teacher for oral encouragement or positive feedback were "good," "good job," "great," "interesting idea," "excellent." This matches Reigel's views (2005.) Some questions were also used by the teacher such as: "What do you think?," "Would you like to add anything to that?," and "Do you agree with that?"

### Classroom participation and management of groupwork

The teacher's management of classroom discussions is closely associated with classroom participation. This is seen on Question #3 (Q1): In what ways or situations do you feel more motivated to participate in class?, Manuel answers, "When there's a topic of discussion that I find interesting or I feel comfortable with. I like the type of discussions were *you must raise your hand to speak* instead of only speaking loud enough to interrupt others." In addition, on Question #3 (Q2) Manuel was asked, Do you consider that the teacher's attitude motivated you? He considers that, "Yes, because he asked me for my opinions, and he also

motivated me because *he kept the 'rules of the game' (class discussion) clear at all times and he respected them. He tried to have participation from everyone.*"

During the observations, on Question #10 (OC): Does Manuel participate in pairwork or groupwork activities? The answer was in all observation sheets "Yes" (100%) with some notes by the observers like: "He shows interest in participation;" "He took the initiative in some activities;" "He participates very enthusiastically."

### **Self-confidence**

On Question #9 (Q1): Do you feel confident when participating in class?, Manuel expressed, "It depends on the classroom environment the teacher creates. I may feel nervous during the first days of class when I don't know most people. Sometimes I don't feel confident because *words escape me and I 'get stuck' in the middle of a sentence...*" This is expressed again on his answer to Question #4 (Q2): Do you feel more self-confident when participating in class now? He says that, "Yes, I feel I can *express myself more easily now, I use more vocabulary and I have better pronunciation now, although... I still 'get stuck' once in a while. I also feel that even if I'm not as fluent as my classmates, I have a lot to contribute to class in terms of the chemistry field and my professional experience.*" These ideas evidenced the importance of expanding his vocabulary for class participation.

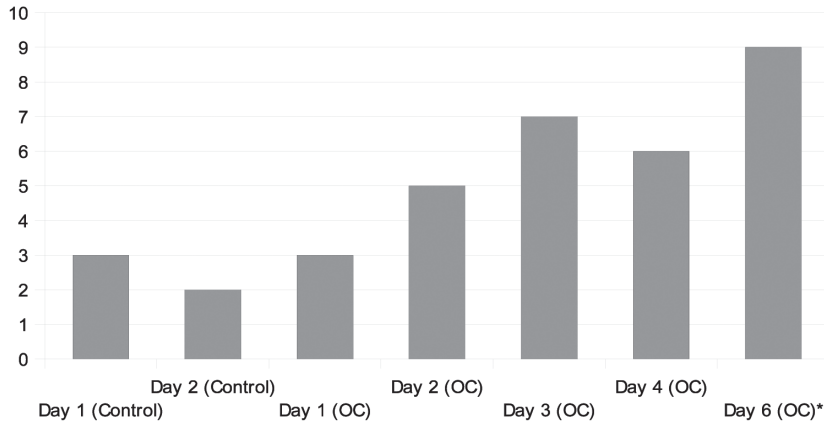
Also, on Question #8 (OC): Does Manuel show a self-confident attitude during pairwork or groupwork? The answer in the Control Observation sheets and two Observed Sessions was "No" (20% of the Observed Sessions) whereas "Yes" was checked in 80% of the Observed Sessions. Some of the notes taken by the observers read, "He is very nervous;" "He seems anxious;" "He participates with a *relaxed* attitude," "He speaks slowly but *confidently*," and "He seems *as self-confident as his other classmates.*"

### **Class Records (quantitative information)**

Quantitative information on the other hand, consisted of tallying Manuel's frequency and total time of classroom participation based on the last two questions of the Observation Checklist. These calculations were processed using the audio recordings of each day of observation. Thus, on Question #11 (OC): Total amount of groupwork interventions made by Manuel, the findings can be seen on Figure 2:



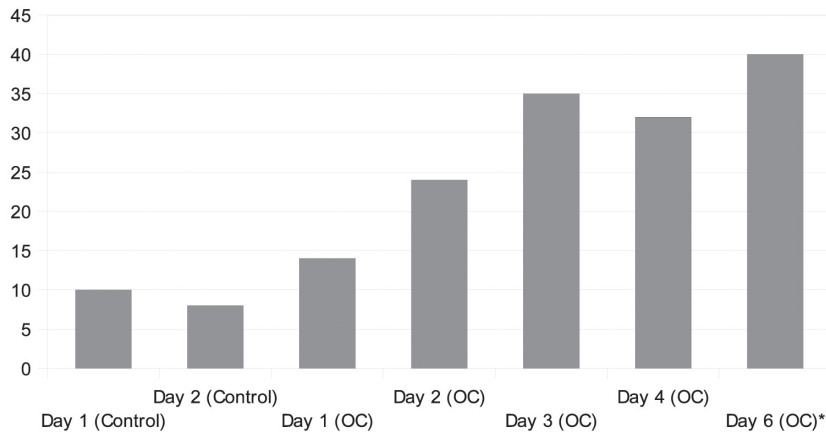
**Figure 2**  
**Question #11 (OC): Total amount of groupwork interventions made by Manuel**



\*Note: Only five sessions with the Observation Checklist (OC) were possible due to Manuel's absence to class on Day 5.

Finally, the total participation time by Manuel during groupwork was collected on Question #12 (OC): Total amount of time of Manuel's interventions in class is presented in Figure 3:

**Figure 3**  
**Question #12 (OC): Total amount of time of Manuel's interventions in class (in minutes)**



\*Note: Only five sessions with the Observation Checklist (OC) were possible due to Manuel's absence to class on Day 5.

## Analysis of Results and Conclusions

### Oral encouragement, motivation, participation, self-confidence, and classroom management (qualitative information)

The results from qualitative instruments (Q1, Q2, and OC) report a close relationship between oral encouragement, motivation, classroom management, and self-confidence when promoting Manuel's classroom participation. The main conclusions of this project can be summarized as follows based on the information provided in section Findings and Results.

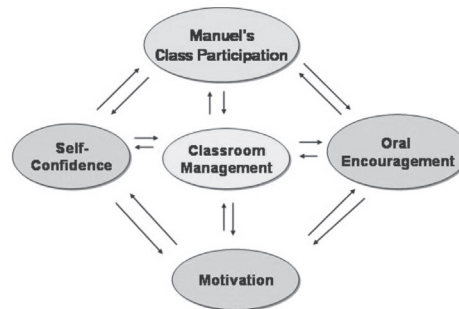
In terms of motivation for classroom participation, it was visually influenced by the teacher's responses to Manuel's contributions to the class. Besides, it was observed that extrinsic motivation (oral encouragement) can create intrinsic motivation. (For example, Manuel's statement to become "more demanding on myself...") As a matter of fact, a student who is motivated enough will participate in group discussion in spite of his/her low proficiency level if he/she feels he/she can make an important contribution. Class participation can be thus, independent from the level of fluency of a motivated student.

It has been mentioned that motivation promotes participation, and participation promotes self-confidence, but not necessarily in that order. Motivation, participation, and self-confidence go hand in hand. However, which have an effect on the others is not completely clear. The exact "direction of influence" in the relationship between these factors cannot be concluded with accuracy. Further study is required. As a result, our original virtuous cycle Oral Encouragement-Motivation-Confidence-Class Participation could be re-stated as seen on Figure 2. It includes Classroom Management as a key element in addition to the freer flow of the interaction between these factors.

On the other hand, the teacher's role became a key factor in promoting participation. For example, asking for opinion, confirming, echoing, and emphasizing Manuel's utterances fostered his motivation to participate more. Oral encouragement by means of praise expressions such as "that's interesting," "great," or "good job" can trigger a feeling of motivation and interest towards class or group discussion. Furthermore, prompting and asking questions such as "What do you think?," "Would you like to add anything to that?," and "Do you agree with that?" have a motivating effect and increase class participation. The teacher should allow and promote equal intervention from all students independently of their level of proficiency.

In fact, the teacher should not dominate discussion nor allow a few students to take discussions over. Rules for groupwork and class discussion should be clear and enforced at all times in order to motivate students to participate. Classroom management during groupwork is an aspect that had not been considered at the beginning of this project as a *decisive* factor in the virtuous cycle "Oral Encouragement- Motivation- Self-Confidence – Class Participation."

**Figure 4**  
**Virtuous Cycle: Class Participation, Oral Encouragement, Motivation, (Self-Confidence), Classroom Management**



#### **Frequency and total amount of time of class participation (quantitative information)**

The results from quantitative instruments (class recordings) show a progressive curve of frequency and total amount of time of Manuel's class participation. In this sense, had Manuel's interventions been longer and more frequent (as deduced by the ratio between Charts 1 and 2), the relationship between motivation, oral encouragement, self-confidence, class management, and class participation although complex, could have been deduced with more precision. There seems, however, that there is no clear mathematical ratio between these aspects.

In the Control Sessions, there was a retrograde pattern in frequency and total participation time. This could be attributed to the lack of oral encouragement by the teacher during those instances. On the other hand, during the Observation Sessions, there was a notorious progress in the amount of both frequency and total participation time. This could be attributed to the teacher's positive feedback and its effects on motivation and self-confidence.

Finally, as Manuel's participation frequency increased, his total participation time also increased. This ratio of time/frequency cannot be mathematically expressed nor discovered in this project since it was not part of this project's objectives. Nevertheless, it was established that higher motivation and self-confidence plus good classroom management (for group activities) have an evident positive influence on frequency and total participation time.

#### **Notes**

- 1 Although during both types of classroom interaction feedback is provided, for the purpose of this research only teacher feedback will be discussed in the section relative to Oral Encouragement below.
- 2 The influence of the teacher on the students' motivation will be discussed in "Oral Encouragement" below.

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## Appendix A

### Questions for Interview I (Q1):

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

1. A la hora de participar en clase oralmente: ¿qué tipo de interacción o trabajo prefiere? ¿Actividades individuales, en parejas o en grupo? Explique.
2. ¿Cuál es su principal fortaleza o ventaja a la hora de participar en clase?
3. ¿De qué manera se siente más motivado para participar? Dé un ejemplo.
4. Mencione alguna experiencia positiva que le ayudó a sentirse más motivado para participar en clase.
5. Mencione alguna experiencia negativa que le haya desmotivado para participar en clase.
6. ¿Cómo debe el profesor motivar a los estudiantes? Explique o dé ejemplos.
7. ¿Le da pena participar en clase?
8. ¿Le da miedo participar en clase?
9. ¿Siente confianza para participar en clase?

## Appendix B

### Questions for Interview (Q2)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Qué hizo el profesor para motivarlo a Ud.?
2. ¿Considera que la actitud del profesor lo motivó a Ud.?



3. ¿Cree Ud. que mejoró su desempeño después de los comentarios que le hacía el profesor?
4. ¿Se siente Ud. más seguro para participar en la clase actualmente?
5. ¿Cómo ha mejorado su producción y su participación en clase?
6. De todo lo que le dijo el profesor: ¿qué lo ha motivado más durante el curso?

## Appendix C

### Class observation checklist (OC)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTIONS: Use the following checklist to evaluate Manuel's class participation and response to the teacher's positive feedback. Check either "Yes" or "No" in each box and offer examples when needed.

Yes	No	Aspect to evaluate:
		1. Does Manuel participate in pairwork or groupwork activities? Observations: _____
		2. Does Manuel show motivation during pairwork or groupwork? Observations: _____
		3. Can Manuel's motivation be considered as <i>extrinsic</i> (due to external reasons -teacher's comments-)? Observations: _____
		4. Does Manuel evidence a <i>positive</i> attitude towards pairwork or groupwork? Observations: _____
		5. Does Manuel evidence a <i>negative</i> attitude towards pairwork or groupwork? Observations: _____
		6. Positive emotions: Does Manuel show a <i>relaxed</i> attitude during pairwork or groupwork? Observations: _____
		7. Negative emotions: Does Manuel show an <i>anxious</i> attitude during pairwork or groupwork? Observations: _____
		8. Self-Confidence: Does Manuel show a <i>self-confident</i> attitude during pairwork or groupwork? Observations: _____

9. Response to teacher's comments: Does Manuel show a *positive* response (more motivated, more relaxed, more self-confident) attitude during pair-work or groupwork?

Observations: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Examples of the teacher's comments (oral encouragement – positive feedback):

*To be used when listening to the class' audio recording:*

11. Total amount of groupwork interventions made by Manuel: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Total amount of time of Manuel's interventions in class: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

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