

Emotions as Learning Enhancers of Foreign Language Learning Motivation

Las emociones como potenciadoras de la motivación en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera

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The present article reports on a study that explores the effects of the emotional experiences of Mexican language learners on their motivation to learn English. In this qualitative research we present how emotions impact the motivation of university language learners in south Mexico. Results suggest that emotions, both negative and positive, contribute to enhancing and diminishing motivation. Although negative emotions may be considered detrimental to foreign language learning, the findings of this study show that negative emotions serve as learning enhancers. Results also evidence that Mexican language learners perceive negative emotions as positive for their language learning process.

Key words: Emotional experiences, foreign language learning, motivation.

En este artículo se presenta una investigación en la que se exploran los efectos que causan las experiencias emocionales en la motivación de estudiantes mexicanos al aprender inglés. Con base en un estudio cualitativo se presenta cómo las emociones inciden en la motivación de estudiantes universitarios en el sur de México. Los resultados sugieren que las emociones, tanto positivas como negativas, contribuyen a potenciar y disminuir su motivación. Se encontró que a pesar de que las emociones negativas pueden afectar el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, estas actúan incluso como potenciadoras del aprendizaje. Los resultados también indican que los estudiantes mexicanos perciben las emociones negativas como positivas en su proceso de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, experiencias emocionales, motivación.

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Introduction

From the first motivational studies, affective aspects have been considered to be as important as language aptitude in language learning success (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985). However, no consideration was given to these until humanistic education brought attention to the affective domain. Affective factors research in foreign language learning has concentrated on constructs such as self-esteem and learners' beliefs (Aragão, 2011). Although this research has advanced our knowledge of these factors, emotions have not yet been given enough attention in foreign language learning research (Imai, 2010).

Although the introduction of the humanistic methods e.g. The Silent Way, Community Language Learning and Suggestopedia acknowledged the important role of affect in language learning, some scholars did not consider this approach beneficial for language learning. While some authors favoured the use of affective strategies or humanistic activities in language classes (Arnold, 1998; Arnold & Brown, 1999), others state that English language teaching (ELT) teachers should be more concerned with the language they are supposed to help students learn (Gadd, 1998).

Currently, researchers recognize the need to review motivation from an affective perspective (MacIntyre, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005, 2007; Meyer & Turner, 2006). Nevertheless, motivation research in foreign language learning has largely focused on studying it as if motivation were a stable, non-dynamic construct which is not developed through interaction with teachers, peers, subject content and context (Dörnyei, 2000; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2004). Some studies have concentrated on establishing correlations between motivation and language proficiency (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006), while other studies have focused on identifying and analysing diverse motives and validating motivational theories, instead of concentrating on the development

of motivational strategies than can help students to cope with the process of learning a foreign language (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Consequently, motivation has largely been researched within a quantitative approach which has provided diverse results in the field of English language teaching.

Although some studies have been done on emotions in ELT (Hurd, 2008, Garret & Young, 2009; Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010, Aragón, 2011), they have not concentrated on the connection of these to the motivational behaviour displayed by foreign language learners. Due to this situation, our research question was: What effects do emotional experiences have on foreign language learners' motivation? Thus, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on how foreign language learning motivation is shaped by emotions.

Origin of this Research Project

Our research interest was based on a piece of research one of the researchers had undertaken (Méndez, 2003). In this previous study, affective strategies were found to be amongst those least used by students. This was surprising for us since the study was carried out in Mexico, which is a collectivist society (Hofstede, 2010). Mexicans in general are people who make use of social and affective skills in all areas of their lives. Why, then, were Mexican students not making use of affective strategies?

Current motivation literature states the need to start researching foreign language learning motivation from an affective perspective (MacIntyre, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005, 2007; Meyer & Turner, 2006). The new direction scholars suggest regarding motivation research matched with our interest in affective strategies by combining these with motivation, which is considered to be a factor that can make a student succeed or not succeed in their language learning process. Therefore, our study focused on the role played by the emotional experiences foreign language

learners undergo during classroom instruction, and how these impact their motivation.

Overview of Motivation and Emotions Studies

In order to understand the role of emotions in language learning motivation, we focused on two theoretical constructs: motivation and emotions.

Motivation

The motivation construct is a very complex one that cannot be analysed from an isolated angle (Dörnyei, 2001). Different motivational approaches have been developed in order to try to understand this multifaceted construct. Four motivational psychology theories have been selected as those informing the interpretation of this study's results: self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), attribution theory (Weiner, 1992), self-worth theory (Covington, 1998) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy refers to "(...) people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). These beliefs are the ones that shape how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. According to this theory, people with a high level of self-efficacy engage in tasks with the conviction that they possess the capabilities needed to succeed in them. In contrast, a person with a low level of self-efficacy avoids difficult tasks and resorts to their personal weaknesses to justify their lack of effort to pursue certain goals.

Self-efficacy beliefs affect human activity cognitively, affectively, motivationally and socially. People tend to plan what to do and how to achieve their goals, so this planning is shaped by the beliefs people have about their abilities to achieve such goals. Self-efficacy beliefs influence people affectively because, as a result of their ability assessment, some people are more

prone to suffering from depression when involved in a challenging or threatening situation. However, positive self-efficacy feelings can encourage people to continue making their best effort in order to achieve specific goals. Thus, a person's life course is determined by the abilities they believe they possess.

Attribution theory assumes that human motivation is a result of the need to know the reason why something has happened. Thus, causal attributions of a phenomenon can be given to a person or to environmental factors. If a student, for example, has had very bad learning experiences which he or she attributes to his or her capacities, he or she might not be willing to participate in any learning activity again because he or she considers that the cause of failure is something he or she cannot change (his or her cognitive ability); however, if a learner considers that the reason for failure is that he or she did not make his or her best effort, then he or she could go into a new learning situation with the disposition to make his or her best effort so he or she can have better results this time. According to the most well-known scholar Weiner (1980), "The most salient causal inferences are ability and effort, but many other factors are also influential" (p. 393).

According to Covington (1992), self-worth theory "(...) assumes that the search for self-acceptance is the highest human priority, and that in schools self-acceptance comes to depend on one's ability to achieve competitively" (p. 74). Thus, in schools learners are considered as worthy as their abilities to achieve educational goals imposed by schools and teachers. As such, a student's value is measured only through school achievement. This being the case, in school achievement, the focus of student life, different actions are performed by students in order to protect their self-image. Ability equals worth in schools, and it is this premise that makes students develop strategies such as over striving or cheating to protect themselves from negative appraisal of their ability by their peers.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), self-determination theory focuses on “(...) investigating people’s inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration” (p. 68). They consider that the construct of motivation lies in a continuum of self-determination that goes from amotivation (lack of motivation) through external, introjected, identified and integrated regulation (externally regulated) to intrinsic motivation (intrinsically regulated). Ryan and Deci’s (2000) final type of motivation on the continuum, *intrinsic motivation*, is “(...) the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (p. 70). In order for this type of innate motivation to be maintained, Ryan and Deci identify three conditions that need to be present: competence, relatedness and autonomy. Thus, it is not only that people need to feel competent in the different actions they perform throughout their lifetime, but they also need to feel that these actions are self-initiated in a supportive environment. Relatedness refers to the need people have to be accepted, respected and connected to significant others in their social environment. According to the abovementioned authors, the social environment in which people grow is a crucial determinant of the enhancement or diminishment of intrinsic motivation.

Motivation is powerfully influenced not only by learners’ personalities but also by personal experiences, cognitive processes and the social context. Learners’ behaviour is determined by the need to protect their self-image and to preserve their self-worth, and is influenced by significant others and the socio-cultural context in which they live. Thus, motivation is powerfully influenced not only by learners’ personalities but also by personal experiences, cognitive processes and the social context. All of these factors imply an array of emotions and feelings aroused in intra- and interpersonal

interactions. A complex interaction of numerous student and situational characteristics determines foreign language learners’ motivation. Given that language learning is a socially constructed process, the diversity of emotions experienced is a crucial aspect impacting on the motivational behaviour displayed by foreign language learners.

Emotions

Feelings and emotions experienced by students are considered important in understanding learning processes, student motivation and effective teaching (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002; Meyer & Turner, 2006). Feelings and emotions are said to be a result of the evaluation students make of particular situations while learning (Pekrun, 2000). These evaluations are influenced by previous experiences, the social context and their personal goals (Pekrun et al., 2002; Sansone & Thoman, 2005). This is of particular relevance to the learning of a foreign language since students mostly come with previous positive or negative experiences; sometimes the new learning environment is very different from previous ones, and they may have a diversity of motives for engaging in foreign language learning. The interplay of all these variables in one emotional event during classroom instruction may have different meanings for individual students and cause diverse effects on students’ motivation (Do & Schallert, 2004). The resulting tasks learners decide to carry out account for the amount of motivational energy variation language learners go through during the different stages of their learning process (Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2004). Emotional experiences play a significant role since behind the reasons for deciding to study a foreign language or keep up with the task, emotions and feelings are involved. Those feelings and emotions experienced during foreign language learning/instruction are then important to understand so language teachers can adjust their approach to one that can help them reduce the negative impact

emotions can have on learners' motivational energy, and enhance the promotion of those emotions that can activate learners' motivation.

Pekrun et al. (2002) found that anxiety was the emotion most frequently reported in five studies conducted using quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, these studies reveal 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. suggest 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 as well as foster positive ones.

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 motivational energy) or continue making the best effort possible to achieve a particular goal. Thus, the change in motivational energy can be positive or negative; it depends on the interplay of emotions with internal and external factors. In addition, feelings and emotions can help someone to redirect their motivational energy. In the course of academic work, students can find that something strongly interests them and redirect all their attention and motivation toward that particular task.

Garret and Young (2009) explored the emotional reactions originated during a Portuguese as a foreign language course for a period of eight weeks. Although their study was not focused on accounting for emotions, emotions became the core of the description provided by Garret's responses to instruction, revealing the significant role emotions play in language learning processes. Garret and Young (2009) described 255 positive emotional experiences

and 69 negative ones. Positive and negative experiences were mainly engendered because of the teachers' voices, social relations, cultural learning and language awareness.

Imai (2010) investigated the manifestation of emotions during group-work preparation for a second language oral presentation. 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, emotions felt by the three members of the group served to construct the same feelings towards the activity through negotiation of their reactions to 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 learners in classrooms go through. In the individual reflections of three learners, the interaction of their previous language learning experiences, current learning events and goals played a significant role in their motivational behaviour. In this self-regulated framework where instances of face-to-face interaction were minimal and requested by learners, the facilitator's gestures and verbal feedback caused such negative emotions in one student that she withdrew from the course. These results showed how even the scarce contact with instructors initiated by learners in this learning context evoked such negative emotions that their motivation was 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. Thus, the significant effect of instructors in the ELT field was displayed even in autonomous language learning experiences, which confirms that the development of positive interpersonal relations in language learning

processes is a core aspect of instilling motivation and effective ELT.

Research Design

This study followed a qualitative approach since our purpose was to gain a deep understanding of the emotional reactions engendered during foreign language classroom instruction. The purpose of qualitative research is to examine any social phenomenon by enabling the researcher to go into the participants' naturalistic setting and try to get a comprehensive understanding of it (Bryman, 2004). In the following section we will present the participants, the techniques and the data analysis process.

Participants of the Study

This study was carried out in a public university in south Mexico. A group of 24 students who were starting their second year of the ELT programme was best suited for the purpose of the investigation. The group selected was chosen because the teacher in charge of the language class agreed to give us access; thus, convenience sampling was exercised (Bryman, 2004). Purposeful sampling was employed and the sample was small because the intention was to obtain rich information about students' emotional experiences in classroom language instruction and the effect of those 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 researchers of the study are part of the ELT programme staff, the main researcher was not teaching during the study period. Participation was voluntary and 18 students agreed to share their emotional experiences during classroom language instruction. Students were informed about the purpose and activities involved in this investigation. Consent forms were given to the participants who used a pseudonym while participating in the study.

No intervention on participants' classes was made since, as Do and Schallert (2004) advise, "Studies are needed that focus on emotions and moods embedded in a real context rather than induced and separated out for investigation" (p. 620).

Methods of Data Collection

Qualitative methods allow the gaining of a deep understanding of the motives behind human behaviour (Barbour, 2008). Data were gathered through personal narratives, an emotional reactions journal and semi-structured interviews. Participants completed these three techniques using their native language / their mother tongue because we did not want to restrict their emotional descriptions. Personal narratives were selected as the instrument to find out about the development of students' motivation to register in the ELT programme. Personal narratives were written at the beginning of the study period. According to Oxford (1995), "The technique of writing language learning histories gives learners the opportunity to describe their own language learner experiences and express their feelings about those experiences" (p. 581). Since this study is focused on students' feelings, we felt that this instrument would be best suited to finding out not only the origin of the students' motivation but also of the feelings experienced during those specific moments when motivation developed. One of the main advantages of personal narratives is that they give us access into learners' private worlds and provide rich data (Pavlenko, 2002, 2007). Since emotions are not always observable, the best way to get into people's feelings and emotions is to let them narrate them to us.

Interviews were identified as a suitable source of data to explore students' affective experiences. According to Yan and Horwitz (2008), "(...) studies that encourage learner reflection through interviews (...) would seem to have the potential to yield a richer understanding of learners' perceptions (...)" (p. 153).

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to be used as a general guide so that some issues that were not considered by the researcher but that participants considered important could be addressed in the interview. 18 interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed at the end of the term (see Appendix).

In this study, the journals were focused on those events students experienced during classroom instruction that triggered in them an emotional reaction. Students were asked to keep a journal over 12 weeks of their term. Students were free to report about any emotion felt in their journal entries which were sent electronically weekly.

According to Hascher (2008), students' journals "(...) are a useful qualitative approach to explore students' emotions (...) they offer a precise view on an individual's perspective and they enable a context-sensitive understanding of emotions in schools" (p. 95).

Data Analysis

The study followed a Grounded Theory approach for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), 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 of a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2004; Creswell, 2009). The data analysis was divided into four stages. In the first stage personal narratives were read to understand the motivational events that led students to register in the ELT programme. In the second stage students' emotional journal entries were read over the 12 week period in order to identify the emotions experienced by students during classroom instruction. Then, the journal entries were collapsed into three sets and imported to Nvivo 8 software to aid analysis of the study period (weeks 1-4; weeks 5-8; weeks 9-12). Stage three included the transcription and analysis of the interviews. This stage allowed us to verify that some patterns identified in journals were

also present in the final interviews. The final stage included the analysis of journal sets and interviews in Nvivo 8 software. Units of text were grouped together in analytic categories and were given a title. Data were systematically reviewed to ensure that references under analytic categories supported these categories. Participants of this study were asked to confirm that the conclusions we drew from the information provided by them corresponded to the world they wanted to present to us. Participants were also asked to check transcripts of the interviews and edit their content if desired. Although some participants did edit or add to the final interviews used for analysis, most students left them as transcribed.

Based upon the above description of the data analysis, the emerging themes are presented in the following section.

Findings

The categories that emerged from our data analysis are presented in four sections: positive effects of positive emotions, negative effects of positive emotions, negative effects of negative emotions and positive effects of negative emotions (see Table 1). This last one is presented with its corresponding subcategories: language learning awareness, language learning strategies and developing motivational strategies. These three perspectives are aimed at presenting a richer and more complete picture of the diversity of responses found in Mexican students' emotional experiences. The data were translated into English for the purpose of this publication. Real names of participants have been changed throughout the whole article.

Effects of Emotional Experiences on Language Learners' Motivation

All (18) students considered that emotions, both positive and negative, were of great importance for their language learning process because emotions

Table 1. Categories and Subcategories

Effects of emotional experiences on language learning motivation			
Category 1 Positive effects of positive emotions	Category 2 Negative effects of positive emotions	Category 3 Negative effects of negative emotions	Category 4 Positive effects of negative emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-efficacy feelings • Positive learning environment • Reloading their motivational energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resting on their laurels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling insecure • Poor class participation • Negative learning environment • Learning English perceived as difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language learning awareness • Language learning strategies • Developing motivational strategies

encouraged them not to quit their language classes and gave them the drive to overcome those academic problems they were facing, as they reported:

(...) emotions are of great importance, without them I would have been a mediocre student...leaving everything half-assed, and thanks to them I am still at university. I consider that there are not good or bad emotions ... good as well as bad ones ended up being good because without the bad ones I would not have had the push to make my best effort at university. (Enrique, Interview)

As revealed by all (18) students in the study, emotions were positive because they helped them think about their role as language learners, made them realize those areas they needed to work on and, most importantly, made them reflect upon their responsibility as language learners.

Positive Effects of Positive Emotions

Students experienced positive emotions that allowed them to have feelings of enhanced self-efficacy. These feelings allowed them to attest their language advancement, which contributed to removing their insecurity and giving them confidence, as expressed by some students:

...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 examination marks, which are very valuable for Mexican students:

Happiness because I saw the results ... I could confirm that if I worked hard I could have good results ... this is what makes ... this is what makes me feel happy ... knowing that yes, I can! (Kenya, Interview)

Confidence allowed students to take some risks in their language learning process and some started to refer to mistakes as something that they 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 TV shows in English (USA 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.

Negative Effects of Positive Emotions

Students experienced feelings of self-efficacy after completing tasks successfully. Nonetheless, 16 of

them recognised that after a positive emotion they did nothing to improve their language learning process:

Well ... a negative emotion leads you to analysis ... happiness ... um, there is nothing to analyse there because you are happy as you obtained what you wanted, but negative experiences are the ones we need to think about, reflect on and look for the positive side of. You have to look for that positive side in order to be more proactive or a winner, we can say in that respect. (Jimmy, Interview)

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

Negative Effects of Negative Emotions

Negative emotions were frequently experienced by this group of students. There were different factors that triggered negative emotions such as: teachers' marking systems, feedback approaches and learning environment. For the first time students were facing 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 having wanted to study something different but, because of financial reasons, they had had to choose a degree at the local university. This fact made them doubtful about being in the ELT programme.

Having obtained such a low mark made me feel really bad and has made me think about the English language teaching programme being the right degree for me. (Jane, 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 English learning as a very difficult task that they were not able to accomplish.

If I was feeling confident, OK about my development in class—this week made me feel really down. This was because of a

writing task...we all felt that our work was not perfect but good. However, I realised it wasn't. It was completely frustrating (...) I wonder if I will be able to learn English someday! (Jaded-Journal. Weeks 1-4)

This perception was magnified by the presence of an advanced group of students in 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 more proficient learners in the group. The language proficiency difference contributed to a lack of group cohesion, which made the learning environment very ineffective:

I had an oral presentation and I thought, 'I don't want that guy to come'. I feel intimidated when he is in the class because I think he is going to say something ... someone told me he criticises and makes fun of the rest of the class ... so I now feel frightened even in oral exams because I don't want to take it with him because besides being beaten by him he is going to make fun of me and that is my fear. (Esperanza, Interview)

Lack of group cohesion contributed to students' feelings that they were not allowed space and time to practise. This feeling led them to think they were not making any progress and perceived their pronunciation to be not as good as that of their classmates. This constrained their participation in class because they knew that some classmates would mock them. Fearing the teacher's feedback and their peers' mockery led students to stop trying in class. This made some students feel angry with themselves but they reported that sometimes their fear of mockery was higher than their desire to speak fluently.

Although students reported that being afraid of speaking English and having a fear of their peers' mocking were constant feelings throughout the term, they also revealed, importantly, that the effects of these events were short-lived because they could not spend all the time recalling a specific negative event.

Positive Effects of Negative Emotions

It seems contradictory that, although some (nine) students reported not having chosen the ELT programme at the university as their first choice, they were struggling hard in order to continue in the course in spite of their constant negative experiences. However, from the perspective of self-determination theory, Mexican participants may have internalised as their own the demands of their parents and relatives to whom they feel a very strong attachment. As suggested by Bao and Lam (2008), "People from collectivistic cultures may still be motivated when they act on the demands of in-group others because they can internalize such demands" (p. 270).

Negative emotions started to emerge during the first sessions of the course. Students' knowledge was very basic and they started to panic when unable to understand everything the teacher was saying or explaining. Fear, worry and sadness were the three main negative emotions students experienced during the first third of the term. Students reported being afraid of being laughed at while participating in class activities, worried about not being able to understand everything the teachers were explaining, and sad about their lack of vocabulary which restricted their participation in class. The language proficiency difference 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:

Well ...I asked a student from the last semester to help me re-view my pronunciation for the oral exam. (Esperanza, Journal. Weeks 5-8)

I have to think that I am at a learning stage ... I do not have to ask myself what I cannot do at this stage ... I have to work on this. (Angelica, Journal. Weeks 1-4)

Language Learning Awareness

Students' constant comparisons with their proficient peers not only made them feel sad and frightened, it also made them aware of the time and effort needed to be able to speak fluently:

Well ... I have tried to do certain things so I can feel good about myself and do not feel sad or down because I see the advanced students. If they are more proficient it is because they have studied more and I do not have to feel bad about it. On the contrary, I have to make my best effort in my studies. (Natalia, Interview)

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 practise and chat with native speakers so I can learn expressions and be able to speak better. (Ricardo, Journal. Weeks 1-4)

Students embraced negative emotions 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 on that particular skill. Most students' (17) fear focused on their speaking ability because it was the skill that caused their peers to make fun of them. Students started to look for vocabulary to enrich their oral participation, practised their vocabulary by watching TV shows in English (USA TV programmes), encouraged peers to practise with them in order to gain confidence, and dedicated more time to reviewing the topics covered in class at home.

I analysed myself and realised that I have to practise my English every day ... I registered in a conversation workshop and started to review every night the notes from my class. (Jimmy, Journal. Weeks 1-4)

Most students (16) reported recognising areas in which they were making mistakes, while others started to develop resilience towards negative experiences. Some students (ten) stated that these negative ex-

periences were things they needed to overcome if they wanted not only to pass the course, but also to finish the degree. 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 references:

When participating in class and making some minor errors, I realised there is nothing wrong with making them ... we all have to go through that ... and by not taking the mockery or offensive criticisms into account ... I think this is the best I have done to feel motivated to make my best effort in the future. (Jaded, Journal. Weeks 1-4)

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 more easily.

Language Learning Strategies

From experiencing the very first negative emotions in class, students started to look for ways to make their language learning process an effective one. Students resorted to the use of learning strategies to diversify their approach to learning English. Students reported making use of diverse strategies in order to overcome those learning difficulties they were facing in their daily classes. Some (eight) 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 helped beginner students to develop resilience towards negative feelings experienced by their language level difference and encourage less proficient students to make their best efforts, as reported by the different ways they used to approach their learning concerns:

I don't have to feel worthless in class just because others participate or understand better than me. I have to make my best effort to be at their level. (Natalia, Journal. Weeks 1-4)

I started to listen to conversations in English, to watch movies to practise my vocabulary and pronunciation ... and I am also listening to songs in English. (Dayana, Journal. Weeks 1-4)

Language learning strategies were tools students made use of in order to develop their language abilities and their confidence in class. As their ultimate goal was to get a university degree and move on to employment in order to fulfil other needs in their lives, students also resorted to the use of motivational strategies to keep them stimulated to continue in the ELT programme and finish it.

Developing Motivational Strategies

All (18) students agreed that maintaining their motivation was their own responsibility. However, they also considered that teachers could contribute greatly to it by making classes more dynamic and learning activities more fun. Students also recognised that their families were a part of this responsibility. They considered that they needed that affective push from mothers, fathers, siblings and friends to reenergise. Students reflected on their family values when referring to being motivated. Most students (16) resorted to emotional self-regulation and self-encouragement in order to keep their motivation energy at good levels:

Believe in myself ... believe that I can achieve my goal of learning English and finishing the degree if I desire ... 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)
Every day when I arrive at class I repeat to myself that everything is going to be all right and I believe it. (Ricardo, Journal. Weeks 5-8)

Students seemed to have developed resilience towards negative emotions. All students referred to the experience of negative feelings as positive for their language learning process. They all recognised that during their future life they would have to face many negative events so they had to be prepared to face them.

Conclusions

Emotional experiences were identified as having a significant role in Mexican students' motivational behaviour during classroom instruction. Educational scholars have affirmed that emotions play a significant role in motivation to learn (Garret & Young, 2009; Bown & White, 2010; Imai, 2010). In fact, participants in this study reported that attention to affect was the difference in the motivational behaviour they displayed in their language classes.

Emotional experiences had a significant influence on students' motivation. Emotions, both positive and negative, have an important impact on foreign language learners' motivation, since they can activate or deactivate motivational behaviour (Pekrun et al., 2002). Experiencing both types of emotions was considered significant for students' language learning process since they helped them to regulate learning, as well as to regulate emotions. Motivation was revealed as dynamic and evolving. Diverse emotional influences impacted the motivational behaviour of this study's participants. Although students experienced more negative situations than positive ones, they turned these into positive outcomes. The predominance of negative activating emotions (fear,

worry and sadness) in this study might have triggered students' motivational behaviour to overcome those negative emotions in future academic tasks, and this might explain their motivation maintenance.

The frequent and sometimes intense negative emotions reported to be felt by participants in our study were not enough to diminish their overall motivation, since all the participants revealed themselves to be highly motivated to finish the ELT programme (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Negative emotions had the negative effect of causing demotivating behaviour in some students. However, students revealed that negative emotions led them to reflect on the situation experienced, which allowed them to re-evaluate the event and adjust their motivation accordingly. The reflection process described by participants included an attribution stage in which learners gave themselves an explanation of why the event resulted in that emotion (Weiner, 1992).

Participants of this study realised that although there were many factors influencing the way they reacted to emotional experiences, they could only change similar events in the future by improving their language level. As students attributed these negative feelings to their language proficiency, they immediately resorted to the use of learning strategies that helped them face negative emotions and kept them motivated. We believe this realisation during the reflection process is the one that led students to focus on those areas they needed to improve upon in order to enhance their language learning process. Thus, although negative emotions had an immediate negative effect on students' motivational energy, causing such behaviour as task avoidance and withdrawal from class participation, subsequent reflection allowed students to overcome that negative impact and to reenergise in order to continue their learning process.

Motivation in language learning cannot be developed in a vacuum; certain conditions need to be

present before motivation can be initiated. Language learning is a process replete with negative and positive emotions, thus appropriate management of students' emotions is necessary for language teachers to enable them to help their students make their emotions work for them and not against them. The creation of a positive learning environment should therefore be the first aim language teachers strive for. This can be created through promoting group cohesion and establishing good teacher-student relationships. By showing genuine interest in students' learning processes, teachers will inspire trust, confidence and a motivating learning environment.

Reflection should also be encouraged so learners can understand their emotions better as learners, and this can help students set individualised goals to work toward. A peer-support scheme could be set up so students have a space to talk about their learning worries, and where feelings of affiliation can be promoted. Self-evaluation should be encouraged on a weekly or monthly basis so students can review the strategies they are using, the success—or lack of success—they are having with them, and can set new objectives to work towards.

More research needs to be carried out in diverse contexts in order to find out what outcomes are derived from negative emotions and how specific contexts modify their impact on motivation. Future research also needs to make a comparison of the emotional experiences encountered by lower-level and proficient learners. Do students at different levels react differently to the same emotional experiences?

This research has uncovered a range of context governed factors affecting language learning motivation. It also provides evidence for understanding the developmental process of motivation and how language learners become responsible thanks to the reflection on emotional experiences during language instruction. We hope that the results presented can assist in the understanding of emotions experienced

by language learners during classroom instruction and inform the design of interventions and activities to help language learners manage negative emotions.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. How would you describe your language learning experience during this first year of studying in the English language teaching programme? Why?
2. Has your experience in this first year changed your original motivation? How? Why?
3. Can you recall any emotional reactions experienced during this first year?
4. What situations caused these affective reactions?
5. How did you behave when experiencing an emotional reaction?
6. Did these emotional reactions interfere with your language learning classes? How?
7. Did any of your emotional reactions have an influence on your motivation? How? Why do you think this happened?
8. Who/what was responsible for the way you reacted?
9. What did you do about those reactions? How did you manage them?
10. Do you consider that your emotional reactions were important to your language learning motivation?
11. How do you think your motivation could have been improved?
12. Who do you think is responsible for maintaining that original motivation you brought to the English language teaching programme? Why?
13. What keeps (or would keep) your motivational energy high?
14. Have any of your previous ideas about learning English changed in this first year? Why?
15. What have you gained from being involved in this research study?