

MEASURING ATTITUDE TOWARD LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: DESIGN AND VALIDATION OF A SCALE

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Abstract

English is becoming increasingly important as a means of communication in universities around the world. More and more universities in non-English speaking countries are requiring that their students prove their level of English, either upon entering the university, or for graduation. This is the case in most private institutions of higher education in Mexico. Public universities in the country are also beginning to require English. Thus, many learners have an extrinsic, but not necessarily intrinsic, motivation to learn. That is, they decide to learn the language because they must, not because they want to. Considering that attitude and motivation have an important impact on language learning, the objective of this study was to develop an instrument to measure these two constructs. A scale was designed and validated to measure the following elements which make up attitude related to English language learning: self-confidence, motivation, commitment, importance, sense of belonging, and need for the language. To this end, surveys were applied to postgraduate students of the Universidad Cristóbal Colón Campus Calasanz. The study found that motivation to learn the language was an important factor, whereas self-confidence in one's abilities was not.

Keywords: attitude; English language learning; scale; validation

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Introduction

Almost two billion people around the world are studying English as a second language, according to a British Council Annual Report (2013). It is the international language of business and of science. Thus, more and more universities around the world require English, either on entry, or on graduation. This is the case in Mexico.

The past two decades have seen important efforts to increase the level of English proficiency in several Latin American countries. Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Honduras, Peru, Costa Rica, and Paraguay have all implemented educational policies to this end, with varying degrees of success (Sánchez & Diez, 2014).

Mexico was the first country in the region to make the study of English compulsory at the elementary and secondary school level (Santana, Garcia-Santillán, & Escalera-Chávez, 2017; Sayer, 2015). In 2009, the Ministry of Education implemented the National Plan for English in Basic Education (NEPBE), an ambitious project aimed at students from pre-school to sixth grade (Ramirez, Pamplon, & Cota, 2012).

In spite of these important efforts, Mexico is still far from reaching its proficiency goals. The EF English Proficiency Index rates Mexico at 49.88 points, seventh place out of 14 Latin American countries and 43rd place out of 72 countries worldwide (<http://www.ef.com.mx/epi/regions/latin-america/mexico/>). Though several factors may contribute to this lack of success, this study sought to analyze the role of learner attitudes and motivation toward learning the language.

Attitude toward a second language can predict motivation toward learning and both attitude and motivation have an impact on performance in different language skills: reading and listening comprehension, as well as speaking (Oxford, 1990).

Both attitude and motivation are constructs that fall within the more general notion of *self-concept*: “everything we believe (rightly or wrongly) about ourselves” (Mercer, 2012, p. 11) with regards to a certain field. That is, individuals have a self-concept for different abilities, including language learning.

Joan Rubin’s (1975) seminal article on good language learners explains that what distinguishes the good language learner from one who is not is his or

her attitude towards learning the language. This attitude leads them to carry out certain activities - such as seeking opportunities to use the language, or using learning strategies - which in turn, help them learn the language more effectively.

Motivation, on the other hand, “may be construed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal(or goals)” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 120).

Motivation in language learning is responsible for the desire to take certain actions - enrolling in a course, practicing the language, etc. - and also for the amount of effort the learner is willing to invest in those actions (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation includes the need for achievement, self-confidence, aptitude, perceived competence, causal attributions, self-efficacy, perceived value of the activity, sense of agency, attitude, and anxiety, as well as external factors such as significant others, rewards, and the environment itself (Dörnyei, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1997).

Motivation and attitude towards the language are factors which can influence the learning of the language (Dörnyei, 1998), though few studies have been carried out into motivation among older students (Kormos & Csisér, 2008). It becomes important, therefore, to have instruments that help measure these two constructs among university students.

This article presents a scale which has been designed and validated to measure the following attitudes related to English language learning: confidence, motivation, commitment, importance, sense of belonging and need. To this end, surveys were applied to postgraduate students of the Universidad Cristóbal Colón Campus Calasanz.

As mentioned above, we establish the following research question: What are the latent variables that explain attitude toward learning English as a second language?

Attitude

The study of attitude is relevant to the understanding of human social behaviour, as it influences the way people think and act (Briñol, Falces, & Becerra, 2007). Attitude in language learning encompasses one’s perception of oneself, of the culture, the language, and the people who speak it. Attitude includes one’s like or dislike of someone or something, and includes an

evaluation of whether that someone or something is good, bad, beneficial, harmful, valuable or not valuable (Saeed, Iqbal, Akhtar, & Saleem, 2014). Thus, attitude belongs to the domains of both affect and cognition.

Briceño (2006) mentions that cognitive components include the thoughts and beliefs of people about the object of attitude. The affective components group the feelings and emotions associated with the object of attitude. Behavioural components include intentions or dispositions to action, as well as behaviours directed towards the object of attitude.

Among university students, attitude is one predictor variable for success in language learning (Kormos & Csisér, 2008).

Self-confidence and language learning

A self-confident language learner is one who believes she has the ability to master the language. Self-confidence has social and psychological aspects and is an important component of both attitude and motivation. Language learning attitudes usually come from previous positive or negative contact with the language and its speakers (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Nemeth, 2006). Low self-confidence can have a negative effect on learning new languages and can lead to psychological conditions such as insecurity, fear, anxiety and antisocial behavior (Rbio, 2007).

A significant number of studies have reported a positive relationship between self-confidence and learning of other languages (*see* Al-Hebaish, 2012; Benson & Voller, 2014; Oxford, 2016, among others). Strong self-confidence leads the learner to want to improve in the language, and this, in turn, leads to positive results.

Motivation

Motivation “concerns what moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, and to persist in action” (Ushioda, 2008, p. 19). It is a broad construct, encompassing the ideas of attitude, self-confidence, agency, and attribution. It also implies some kind of identification with the second language cultural group (Dörnyei, 2003).

Numerous studies (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Ushioda, 2008, among others) indicate that motivation is fundamental to the study of a second language. Such motivation must come from the learner, and the learner must be able to regulate it and maintain it throughout his studies. It is important to consider, however,

that motivation is dynamic: it fluctuates throughout time (Waninge, Dörnyei, & de Bot, 2014).

Factors involved in motivation and learning are: type of goals set, perspectives assumed before the study, expectations of achievement, attributions of success and failure, study skills, metacognitive skills, and anxiety management (Díaz Bringas & Hernández, 2001).

An interesting concept in motivation is Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self-System, which concerns the discrepancy between the learner's actual state, and the "ideal" self. Kormos and Csisér (2008), in a study of age-related differences in motivation in language learners, found that the concept of an ideal English language speaker self was an important component in motivation among university students. "From this we might conclude that it is one's attitude to English as an international language that affects one's image as a successful user of L2 in the future..." (Kormos & Csisér, 2008, p. 347).

Motivation in language learning differs from that in other fields, because it implies not only learning a certain set of skills, but also identifying with the people who speak that language, and their culture (Ushioda, 2008). As English becomes a more global language, however, this distinction is starting to blur (Kormos & Csisér, 2008).

Commitment to learning the language

According to Ordorica (2010) there are factors that influence students' learning, derived from their positive or negative habits. This goes hand in hand with the commitment that each individual acquires when proposing to study a second language and the effort he or she expends.

Sense of belonging

The feeling of being considered part of a group with similar characteristics and shared tastes often leads the individual to adopt behaviours or customs that differ from their ideals. Although one seeks to find a group as closely identified as possible to one, not all people will think and behave in the same way. Thus, it will be up to each individual to maintain their behaviour and habits or to modify them accordingly.

In this same sense, Gutierrez-Ramirez and Landeros-Falcón (2010) mention that language in general, gives the individual a sense of affinity with

his environment and thus makes him belong to it, through interactions with other people who share similar characteristics.

Need for English

The need to learn English goes hand in hand with its importance and usefulness. Currently, English has taken on the role of a *lingua franca* for communication in the professional and academic spheres, and even in the social and personal spheres. Not speaking the language may be a constraint in many of these fields.

Dörnyei, Csisér and Németh (2006) point out that, not only is a *lingua franca* desirable in today's globalized world, but not having one could be dangerous. The need to learn English, thus, becomes a socially-constructed goal (Ushioda, 2008).

In this way, the variables involved in the study phenomenon have been identified and are the basis of the construct shown below:

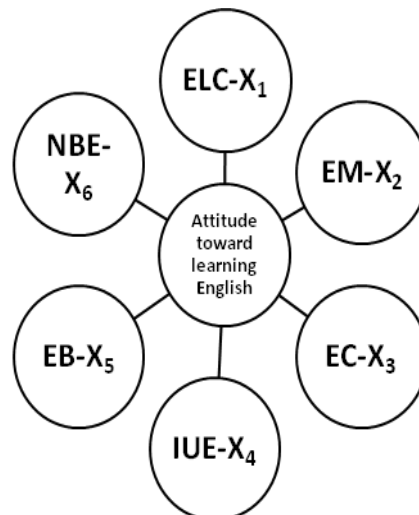


Figure 1. Preliminary study model

Where: ELC-X₁= Self-confidence in learning English, EM-X₂= Motivation to study English, EC-X₃= Commitment to the English language, IUE-X₄= Importance and usefulness of the English language, EB-X₅= Sense of belonging in the English language, NBE-X₆=Need for the English language

Objective

Identify the structure of latent variables that explain attitude toward learning English as a second language.

Hypothesis

H₁: There are factors that contribute to understand the students' attitude towards learning English as a second language.

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were postgraduate students at Universidad Cristóbal Colón, at two of their campuses, Calasanz (UCC Business School) and Torrente Viver, in the city of Veracruz, Mexico. The sample is non-probabilistic since the selection of the cases to be observed does not depend on probability, but rather on elements related to the characteristics and purposes of the research itself. The instrument was applied in person to 96 students enrolled in postgraduate studies in the two campuses, who accepted to participate in the study. Prior authorization was obtained from the postgraduate program coordinators and professors. The participant profile can be found in Graphs 1, 2 and 3, and in Table 2, as well.

Instruments

In order to obtain the data, a psychometric scale of the Likert type was designed to collect variables that measure attitude towards the learning of English. Dimensions and items are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of the scale attitude towards the English language

Key	Dimension	Items
ELC	Self-confidence in learning English	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
EM	Motivation to study English	6, 7, 8, 9, 10
EC	Commitment to the English language	11, 12, 13, 14, 15
IUE	Importance and usefulness of the English language	16, 17, 18, 19, 20
EB	Sense of belonging to the English language	21, 22, 23, 24, 25
NBE	Need for the English language	26, 27, 28, 29, 30

For the validation of the scale, it was first verified that the instrument presented the necessary reliability to provide useful information. The

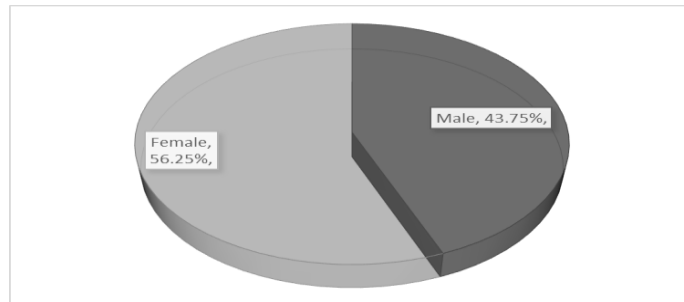
analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which, as stated by García-Santillán, Escalera-Chávez, Santana-Villegas, and Guzmán-Rivas (2016), is not a statistical test, but rather a way of verifying the reliability of the instrument by validating the stability and consistency of the measurements.

Procedure

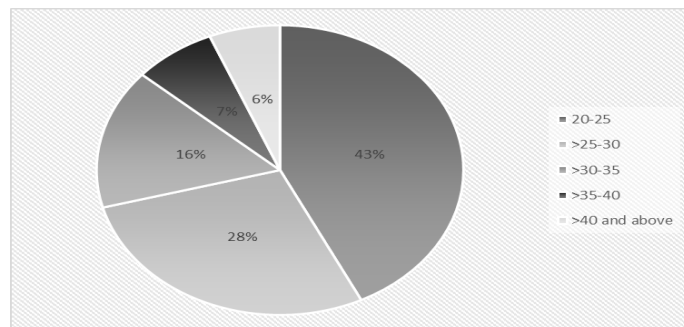
We used the multivariate technique of factor analysis with extraction of principal components as a procedure for the analysis of the data, as reported by García-Santillán (2017). To test the hypotheses we calculated the following statistics: X^2 , Bartlett's test of Sphericity, KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) level of Significance $\alpha=.01$; p-value ($p<.01$, $p<.05$.)

Data Analysis

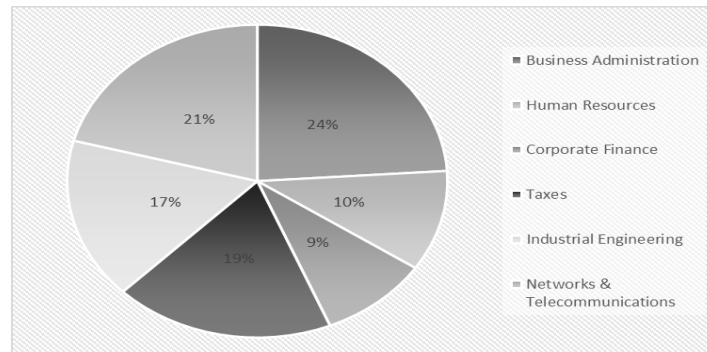
Information about the participant profile:



Graph 1. Population by gender



Graph 2. Population by age



Graph 3. Population by study field

Table 2. Composition of the studied population

Variable	%
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	56.25
Female	43.75
<i>Major</i>	
Business Administration	23.96
Human Resources	10.42
Corporate Finance	9.38
Taxes	18.75
Industrial Engineering	16.67
Networks & Telecommunications	20.83
<i>Age (years)</i>	
from 20 to 25	42.71
Older than 25 to 30	28.13
Older than 30 to 35	15.63
Older than 35 to 40	7.29
Older than 40	6.25

More than half of the participants surveyed are women; the ages of the participants are mostly between 20 and 25 years, while the program from which we have more participants is the Master's in Business Administration.

The empirical results of this study that measures attitude towards English learning are as follows:

Table 3. Reliability of the instrument

Concept	Cases	%	Cronbach's Alpha	
			Elements	Elements
Valid cases	95	99.0	33	6
Excluded	1	1.0		
Total	96	100.0	.746	.661

The results show a Cronbach's alpha of .746 and .661 for all items (33) and grouped (6) respectively, which shows acceptable values according to the theoretical criteria of Hair et al. (1999). Hence, we can state that the scale has a very acceptable internal consistency.

Table 3.1 shows means and standard deviation in order to determine the coefficient of variation. This helps to identify the variables with the most variability with regard to others.

Table 3.1. Descriptive statistics

	Means	SD	Analysis N	Variation coefficient VC= SD/M
ELC-X1	14.7053	2.24496	95	15.27%
EM-X2	14.4526	2.18198	95	15.10%
EC-X3	16.9579	3.18212	95	18.76%
IUE-X4	22.2737	3.26308	95	14.65%
EB-X5	18.4842	3.76112	95	20.35%
NBE-X6	22.1895	3.11241	95	14.03%

Note₁: The variables are: ELC-X₁= Self-confidence in learning English, EM-X₂= Motivation to study English, EC-X₃= Commitment to the English language, IUE-X₄= Importance and usefulness of the English language, EB-X₅= Sense of belonging in the English language, NBE-X₆=Need for the English language. Note₂:*Total 96 cases: Valid cases (95) excluded (1)

The results described in Table 3.1, show the variable EB-X5 (20.35%) is the largest compared to the rest of the variables that show similar behaviour. Also, the variable NBE-X6 (14.03%) and the variable IUE-X4 (14.65%) are the lower values compared to the rest of the variables under study.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

<i>KMO and Bartlett's Test</i>		<i>Variables</i>		<i>MSA</i>
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test for Sampling Adequacy		.607	ELC-X1	.412(a)**
	Chi-squared approximation	208.843	EM-X2	.551(a)
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity			EC-X3	.768(a)
	<i>df</i>	15	IUE-X4	.656(a)
	<i>p.</i>	0.000*	EB-X5*	.634(a)
			NBE-X6	.578(a)

Note₁: The variables are: ELC-X₁= Self-confidence in learning English, EM-X₂= Motivation to study English, EC-X₃= Commitment to the English language, IUE-X₄= Importance and usefulness of the English language, EB-X₅= Sense of belonging in the English language, NBE-X₆=Need for the English language
 Note₂: *p<0.01, p<0.05 Note₃: **ELC-X1 must be excluded

The values of Bartlett's sphericity test with Kaiser .607 and the goodness index of fit X² 208.843 with 15 *df* and the value of p-value <.01 shown in Table 4 allowed us to verify the practical validity of the construct, to justify whether it is feasible to carry out a factor analysis to analyze the data.

However, one of the MSA values (ELC-X1, 0.412a) is below the acceptable theoretical value (> 0.5) and should be excluded from the model.

Therefore, the model was run again and the results are:

Table 4.1. KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

<i>KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</i>		<i>Variables</i>		<i>MSA</i>
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test for Sampling Adequacy		0.630	EM-X2	0.523 ^a
	Chi-squared approximation	187.473	EC-X3	0.859 ^a
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity			IUE-X4	0.637 ^a
	<i>df</i>	10	EB-X5	0.689 ^a
	<i>p.</i>	.000	NBE-X6	0.589 ^a

Note₁: The variables are: EM-X₂= Motivation to study English, EC-X₃= Commitment to the English language, IUE-X₄= Importance and usefulness of the English language, EB-X₅= Sense of belonging in the English language, NBE-X₆=Need for the English language Note₂: *p<0.01, p<0.05

Table 5. Correlations matrix^a

	ELC-X1	EM-X2	EC-X3	IUE-X4	EB-X5	NBE-X6	
Correlation	ELC-X1	1.000					
	EM-X2	-.170	1.000				
	EC-X3	-.183	.223	1.000			
	IUE-X4	.090	.154	.196	1.000		
	EB-X5	-.293	.477	.246	.510	1.000	
	NBE-X6	.069	.152	.234	.830	.617	1.000

Note: Determinant = .101 ELC-X1 Before to be excluded

Table 5.1. Correlations matrix^a

	EM-X2	EC-X3	IUE-X4	EB-X5	NBE-X6
EM-X2	1.000				
EC-X3	.223	1.000			
IUE-X4	.154	.196	1.000		
EB-X5	.477	.246	.510	1.000	
NBE-X6	.152	.234	.830	.617	1.000

Note: Determinant = .129 ELC-X1 was excluded

In table 5, the variable ELC-X1 must be excluded according to criterion of the MSA (> 0.5). Therefore, in Table 5.1, the variable ELC-X1 was excluded. In this table we may observe that the highest correlation is between the variables EB-X5 vs. IUE-X4 (0.510), meaning that the student considers the importance and usefulness of the English language, as well as sense of belonging in the English language. The following significant correlation is NBE-X6 vs. IUE-X4 (0.830). In this association, we can infer that the student considers the importance and usefulness of the English language, and thus, the need for the English language, as well.

A third significant correlation is found in NBE-X6 vs EB-X5 (0.617), from which we can understand that the student feel a need for the English language, in order to achieve a sense of belonging in the English language.

With the exclusion of the variable ELC-X1 (0.412) whose value is lower than the theoretical criterion, we can observe a modification in Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (0.630). The value of X^2 187.473 with 10 *df* and the value of p-value < 0.01 shown in Table 4.1 give evidence of the theoretical and practical validity of the construct, and the factorial technique is justified in addition to rejecting the null hypothesis. The MSA values all tend to 1 and the model is run with 5 factors instead of 6.

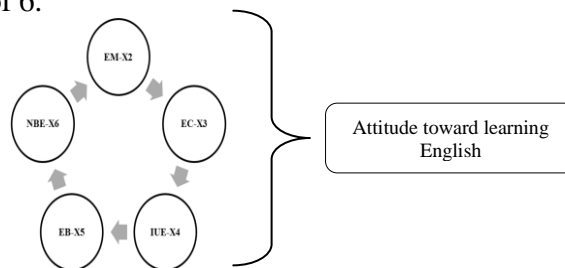


Figure 2. Re-specified causal study model

Now, with the principal components extraction method under the number of factors criterion, the described model of five factors is run in Figure 2 and the result is shown in the component matrix and total variance explained in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Matrix of components and total variance explained

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
NBE-X6	.877				
IUE-X4	.834				
EB-X5	.829		No load >.5	No load >.5	No load >.5
EC-X3		.784			
EM-X2		.732			
Total variance explained	72.93%				

Note₁: Method of extraction - Analysis of principal components (5 extracted components, only two charger more than 0.5) Note₂: The variables are: NBE-X₆=Need for the English language, IUE-X₄= Importance and usefulness of the English language, EB-X₅= Sense of belonging in the English language, EC-X₃= Commitment to the English language, and EM-X₂= Motivation to study English.

Table 7. Total variance explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% variance	%	Total	% variance	%
			accumulate			accumulate
1	2.571	51.413	51.413	2.571	51.413	51.413
2	1.076	21.519	72.932	1.076	21.519	72.932
3	.829	16.573	89.505	.829	16.573	89.505
4	.375	7.493	96.998	.375	7.493	96.998
5	.150	3.002	100.000	.150	3.002	100.000

Note: Method of extraction - Analysis of principal components

In the component matrix, we can observe that only three components were extracted. The first of these is composed of the variables NBEX6 (.877), IUEX4 (.834) and EBX5 (.829), and seems to be the one that makes the greatest contribution to the explanation of the phenomenon, since it contributes with 51.41% of the variance of the studied phenomenon. This is followed by the component ECX3 (.784) that represents 21.52% of the variance. Finally, there is the component EMX2 (.732) which totals 89.50% of the variance. Therefore, we can say that the values observed in these indicators are

acceptable to explain the phenomenon under study, in accordance with the theoretical criteria (Hair et al., 1999).

Results

According to the results obtained, five attitudes explain the phenomenon of English language learning.

Self-confidence was rejected because the collected data did not explain English language learning, contrary to the finding of Al-Hebaish (2012) in his study of the correlation between general self-confidence and academic performance in oral presentations. He found that lack of self-confidence leads, over time, to decreased interest, as the learner doubts his skills, does not try or fails and stops trying. Our study found that self-confidence or lack thereof made no significant difference in learning.

The first of the attitudes that do influence English language learning is motivation. This is determined by feelings of accomplishment, which lead to greater effort, and thus, to better results in a shorter period. In this regard, both Diaz Bringas and Hernández (2001) and Ushioda (2008) emphasize that motivation is not only individual. The teacher also plays an important role in keeping students motivated.

The second attitude, which according to the results, influences English language learning, is commitment towards the language. This commitment goes hand in hand with motivation, according to Ordorica (2010). He states that the effort expended by the student in learning will be determined by his or her motivation. Thus, loss of motivation leads to diminished effort and commitment.

The third attitude which leads to English language learning is the current importance and usefulness of the language. In many countries, Mexico among them, the ability to speak English opens doors to better-paid jobs and to increased academic opportunities, not only abroad, but also within the country itself.

In this regard, the need for English was also found to be a determinant attitude in English language learning. Many undergraduate programs have established mastery of English as an exit requirement, and most postgraduate programs set English as an entry requirement. Many jobs and job promotions

also require English. Thus, most young professionals nowadays need the language.

The final attitude to consider is the sense of belonging in the English language. Gutiérrez-Ramírez and Landeros-Falcón (2010) have emphasized the need to develop bilingual skills in order to become a citizen of the world. As Kormos and Csisér (2008) and Ushioda (2008) point out, English no longer “belongs” to the native English speaker community. Rather, the language has become a true global language, and its speakers - native or not - have access to a broader world. However, the findings in our study contrast with those of Ordorica (2010), who did not find that students decide to study English to enter a different culture.

Conclusions

The English language is considered one of the most important languages in the world. It is present in almost all fields, whether cultural (films, music, television, among others); political, economic, or labour, and is considered an important tool as a lingua franca between various cultures.

Previous studies, most importantly Noels et al.’s (2000) Language Learning Orientations Scale - Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation Subscales (LLOS-IEA), sought to understand motivation for languages other than English. Noels et al.’s study, for example, was carried out among English - speaking Canadian university students. However, in that context, the study of a second language was not mandatory.

Thus, the study presented in this paper contributes to the discussion on how the obligation to study a language may have affect the attitude of university students towards that language.

The findings of the present study demonstrate that human attitudes play an important role in English language learning. Self-confidence was the only attitude discarded in our study. Motivation was found to be one of the most important attitudes, and it is in motivation where effective learning of the language mainly lies.

Motivation is essential in learning the English language. Motivation leads the learner to invest time and effort in learning, and to overcome the difficulties which may arise.

Limitations

It is important to note, of course, that the study was carried out in only one institution. A larger scale study involving more universities is an important further step. The sample is small, and because the participants are enrolled in postgraduate studies, this would seem to indicate that they are already motivated to improve their professional skills. It is not clear whether undergraduate students would show the same attitudes towards learning a second language, even one as important as English.

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