An Interpretative Study of the Perceptions and Reactions of Spanish-Speaking Students to Motivators and Demotivators in the English- Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative approach, this study explored and analyzed the experiences of Spanish-speaking students who took English language (EL) classes in grades K-12 as well as the experiences of teachers licensed in EL who teach in public schools in Indiana. Data were collected by conducting individual interviews with four EL teachers and one focus group session with three Spanish-speaking Hispanic students who were English Learners (ELs) for at least four months in Indiana public schools. Analysis demonstrates how motivation is fostered among teachers and students with six emergent themes between the two groups of participants: language learning environment; student-teacher relationship; choice of task or reading material; use of technology; peer scaffolding; and difficulty of the task. Although the emergent themes were present in both sets of data, there were some similarities and dissimilarities in the perception of these themes. While the teachers believed that all six emergent themes played an important role in fostering and promoting motivation in the EL classroom, the students only acknowledged the use of technology, the difficulty of the task, and peer scaffolding as motivators. The interviewed students did not consider the language-learning environment or the student-teacher relationship to be motivators; and the option to choose a task or reading material was not part of their K-12 experience.

Keywords: Spanish speakers, motivation, demotivation, English language

INTRODUCTION

During the last three decades, the number of Spanish speakers in the United States has consistently increased. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau News, as of July 1, 2015, the Hispanic population constituted the biggest minority in this country, 17.6% of the nation's population. Of the 56.6 million Hispanics in the United States, 73.1% age 5 and older speak Spanish at home, and 24% were enrolled in elementary and high school (2016). As the number of Hispanics who speak English as their second language continues to grow, so do their communities and their needs; and one of those needs and rights is to have access to appropriate language education that will allow language minority students enrolled in K-12 to learn English.

Several factors can lead to success when learning a second language. The context, the teacher, the textbook, the materials, and the amount of time of instruction all play important roles within the EL classroom. However, the students themselves and their motivation to learn English, as well as their perceptions and reactions to motivators and demotivators in the classroom, are perhaps the most relevant aspects of the teaching and learning process. It is believed that knowing what motivates or demotivates students to learn the target language will help EL teachers make their language instruction more meaningful and significant for this specific population. Therefore, it becomes imperative to explore and identify the conditions that teachers promote that motivate EL students to learn. Doing this will also allow for a better understanding of the experiences of Spanish-speaking ELs as well as to answer the question of what motivates or demotivates them to learn English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand better the experiences of Spanish-speaking students in the EL classroom, it is pertinent to review former studies regarding this group and the EL instruction they have

received. It is also important to examine some well-known theories on motivation and language learning. This review of literature served as a frame to contextualize this study and its findings.

Spanish-Speaking Students in American Schools

Hispanics in the United States are the youngest population with a median age of 27.4 years compared to the 36.8 years of the total population, and 24% of all children and teenagers enrolled in grades K-12 nationwide belong to this racial/ethnic group. According to Piché, Taylor, and Reed (2002) this "rapid growth has led to population dispersal in the nation as the communities with large shares of immigrants are no longer confined to a few gateway cities or states" (p. 247). In the specific case of Indiana, Hispanics account for 6% of the state population, double the reported percentage in the census for 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2016). Within this group in Indiana, 68% are native-born and 32% are foreign-born. Sixty-three percent of the Hispanic population in the state, ages 5 and older, report to speak a language other than English at home, and 10% of all students enrolled in grades K-12 in Indiana Public Schools (INPS) are Hispanic. This rapid and constant increase has forced schools to adapt their curricula in order to satisfy the language needs and rights of Spanish-speaking students.

Since 1972, Hispanic students have had one of the lowest high school graduation rates when compared to other ethnic and racial groups. This group is also less likely to take and pass advanced placement math and/or science classes when in high school and are more likely to drop out of school. Additionally, "English-language learners are lagging behind other students on math and reading achievement tests, and one-fourth are failing to make progress toward language proficiency" (Jost, 2009, p. 044). Piché et al. (2002) argued that this situation is taking place because "most states have failed to provide the resources needed by schools to effectively educate limited English proficient (LEP) students to high standards" (p. 245). They also

affirmed that in 2002 “only 30% of public school teachers instructing limited-English students nationwide reported receiving any special training for working with these students” (p. 252).

Another problematic issue is the fact that most Spanish-speaking students do not have the level of literacy required in their native language to build a solid base for their second language. Piché et al. (2002) asserted that

> Recent studies of immigrant secondary education programs have identified two LEP student subpopulations as being of special concern. One is the set of immigrant children who arrive as teenagers. The time available for these late-arriving secondary students to master a new language and pass subjects required for high school graduation is limited. Another subgroup that concerns classroom teachers is the growing number of under-schooled newcomers who must overcome critical literacy gaps and the effects of interrupted schooling in their home countries (pp. 251-252).

Most ELs have to learn in high school the skills they should have developed in elementary school. This happens mainly because schools tend to assume “first, that the basic elements for academic success (i.e., educators with appropriate resources and know-how) already exist in the classroom; and second, that students are ready to perform at or near the desired level” (Piché et al., 2002, p. 249). For these students, the struggles that they have to face to learn English might limit not only their academic success in grades K-12 but also their likelihood to enroll in higher education, as only 16.4% of college students (both undergraduate and graduate) in 2014 were Hispanic (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2016).

English Language Instruction in the United States

One of the oldest struggles, not only for Spanish speakers but also for all immigrant groups who speak a language other than English, has been the language barrier they faced when

coming to the United States. In this respect, the landscape of English language education is a constantly evolving one because "the rise in the number of [speakers of a language other than English] is creating new pressures to increase the number of classrooms, expand bilingual education programs, and provide other services for foreign-born students" (Nieves, 1994, para. 7).

In the early 1950s, the debate between bilingual education and English immersion began as a tug-of-war between the two different and seemingly opposing approaches to language teaching and learning. Bilingual education gained a lot of attention, especially in southern states with large numbers of Spanish speakers, such as New Mexico, Nevada, California, Texas, and Florida (Parrillo, 1991, p. 20). However, some sectors of the European-American communities reacted negatively to the idea of including bilingual programs in public schools because they considered that "English-speaking schools provide the heat for the melting pot. Anything else is counterproductive because it reduces assimilation and societal cohesiveness" (Parrillo, 1991, p. 22). Regarding this issue, the Supreme Court ruled in 1974 that

> There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education. Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that before a child can effectively participate in the educational program he [*sic*] must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974).

This decision added controversy to the already heated debate between English immersion and bilingual education. Scholars' opinions vary greatly on this topic. On the one hand, some

experts believe that English immersion should be implemented in schools because the nature of the program allows for rapid assimilation of the language and the culture (Jost, 2009). On the other hand, other scholars believe that having a strong foundation in a first language will allow students to be more successful in their second language (Thomas & Collier, 2002). In fact, a recent study by Umansky and Reardon (2014) found that while it is true that students who learn in English-only environments tend to do better in early outcomes, it is also true that "students in two-language programs catch up and in some instances surpass their peers in all English environments in later grades" (p. 23).

English Language Programs in Indiana

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed his educational reform, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), which introduced and enforced the concept of school accountability based on the students' performance in standardized testing. The NCLB reform also stated specific goals for ELs. More specifically, the main objective of Title III is to help ensure that LEP children attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic competence in English, and meet the same academic content and student achievement standards that all children are expected to meet (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2003). Because of the institution of NCLB (2002), all states had to adopt and administer an English language proficiency (ELP) instrument to measure EL students' progress in English and attainment of English fluency. Indiana Schools implemented the ELP assessment tool, LAS Links that measured listening, speaking, reading, and writing domains of English. LAS Links was first administered in the Spring of 2007, five years after the implementation of NCLB (2002). The LAS Links ELP tool was connected to Indiana's English Language Proficiency Standards (Indiana Department of Education, 2003).

Motivators and Demotivators of Spanish-Speaking Students

In October 2013, Indiana adopted the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English language development standards to replace the formerly used Indiana English Language Proficiency Standards. It is pertinent to say that while Indiana adopted the new WIDA standards in 2013, the state did not begin to implement the aligned ELP assessment, ACCESS, until 2014. In 2013, both WIDA ELP standards and ELP assessment LAS Links were operating and WIDA standards and ACCESS became the same in 2014 (Indiana Department of Education, 2015b). In 2015 there were 60,793 EL students enrolled in K-12 schools in Indiana. Most of these students receive some form of EL classes or language assistance in addition to their regular classes. The counties with the most ELs are Marion (19,335), Elkhart (6,145), Allen (3,832), St. Joseph (2,573) and Tippecanoe (1,999) (McInerny, 2016). In order to recognize and address the needs of this growing population, the Indiana General Assembly revised, Chapter 9 of the Indiana Code, Bilingual and Bicultural Instruction, to amend the Indiana Code as follows:

> It is the policy of the state to provide bilingual-bicultural programs for all qualified students enrolled in Indiana public schools through the establishment of the programs by school corporations. The state recognizes the need for and the desirability of the programs to: (1) aid students to reach their full academic level of achievement; and (2) preserve an awareness of cultural and linguistic heritage (P.L. 1-2005, SEC. 14)

Students who are identified as LEP are placed in EL classes according to their English proficiency levels and mostly remain there until they are reclassified as fluent English proficient (FEP). There is no time limit placed on enrollment in English language development services, and schools must continue to provide English language development services to their LEP students until they are reclassified as FEP (Indiana Department of Education, 2015a).

Motivation and Language Learning

The effect of motivation in language learning has been a topic of study for many years. Gardner and Lambert's (1959) seminal work on motivation and achievement on second language acquisition determined the effect of motivation and attitude on the process of learning a second language. In their study, Gardner and Lambert identified and defined two different types of motivation that influence students' performance in the language classroom; they termed them *integrative motivation* and *instrumental motivation*. Krashen (1981) defined the former as "the desire to be like valued members of the community that speak the second language" and the latter as "the desire to achieve proficiency in a language for utilitarian, or practical reasons, which may also relate to proficiency" (p. 22). Later, Noels, Pelletier, Clément, and Vallerand's (2003) research asserted that motivation in language learning was not a dichotomous construct but rather a construct with three different variables: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. They defined the last variable as a situation in which "people see no relation between their actions and the consequences of those actions," thus, they "have no reason, intrinsic or extrinsic, for performing the activity, and they would be expected to quit the activity as soon as possible" (p. 62). Noels et al. observed that these three components interact and influence students' performance.

Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) related motivation to the concept of self and they identified two separate identities: the "ideal L2 self" and the "ought-to L2 self," which correspond to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation respectively (pp. 616-617). They also argued that it is pertinent for EL teachers to help their students develop and maintain a positive attitude toward the English language in order to increase their motivation, regardless of whether students have the *ideal L2 self* or the *ought-to L2 self* as their final goal. They also believed that research that focuses primarily on students' attitude and motivation has been detrimental for the study of second

language acquisition because such an approach is too simplistic. Csizér and Dörnyei (1998) argued that

> Studies that look only at the impact of motivation on language proficiency or other L2 achievement measures (such as course grades and standardized tests results) ignore, in effect, the mediation link, behavior, and suggest a false linear relationship between motivation and learning outcomes (p. 20).

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) insisted that second language acquisition is a far more complex process, and even though research and suggestions for increasing motivation and improving the students' attitude and achievement in the second language continues to be published,

> No motivational strategy has absolute and general value because such strategies are to be implemented in dynamically changing and very diverse learning contexts, in which the personality of the individual learners and the teacher, as well as the composition and structure of the learner group, will always interplay with the effectiveness of the strategy (p. 224).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argued that even though attitude and aptitude are important for any task, the task itself should promote the thinking processes that are required for its completion because "just having greater skills but no greater challenge can result in boredom, [and] something that becomes too easy to do may lose its value" (p. 122). Therefore, students would lose their motivation to complete an activity, either because the task is not challenging or because they already master the skills required for its completion. Vygotsky (1987) conceived this mastery of skills as the act of an individual moving from one zone of proximal development (ZPD) to the next. This progression includes peer scaffolding, which he defined as "the child's potential to raise himself to a higher intellectual level of development through collaboration" (p. 210) that

can take place between a learner and the teacher or between two learners, as long as one of them is "more knowledgeable" than the other in the specific task. In addition, Vygotsky argued that the link between the ZPD and actual cognitive development lies in the fact that "what the child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (p. 220).

Glasser's choice theory (1998) also incorporates collaboration and social interaction; but he perceived them as means to satisfy basic needs, which are survival, love/belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Of these basic needs, he believed that the need of fun and the need of power are closely related to teaching and learning. Glasser argued that "without the relationship between fun and learning we would not learn nearly as much, especially when we are young and have so much to learn" (p. 31). He argued that "if students do not feel that they have any power in their academic classes, they will not work in school" (p. 9). The "power" that Glasser explores in his choice theory is closely related to the work of Holec (1981) and Dickinson (1995) on learning autonomy. Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), and Dickinson (1995) characterized the same concept as a "situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his/her learning and the implementation of those decisions" (p. 11). Both Holec and Dickinson argued that autonomy is vital for learning, especially in foreign languages, because it allows the learners to set goals, make decisions, and monitor their progress toward their goals. Thus, collaboration or social interaction and autonomy become critical for cognitive development and they play an important role in motivation for language learning.

Demotivation and Language Learning

Demotivation and its effects on students is an often-overlooked area of investigation for language learning. In its most basic definition, demotivation "concerns various negative

influences that cancel out existing motivation" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 142). Dörnyei (2005) affirmed that demotivation is closely related to "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action" (p. 90). Among the external forces identified as demotivators, some of the most commonly reported by language students are teacher-related, more specifically, unfair grading, lack of organization, boring instruction, and an unfriendly learning environment (Dörnyei, 2001). The compulsory nature of a language class is also considered an external demotivator, along with having inadequate school facilities and a previous negative attitude toward the L2, which can originate from home or from past failures in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Teachers whose students are either assigned or forced to take a language class can recognize the challenge that the situation represents, and they are able to observe the characteristics or behaviors that demotivated students display. Among these behaviors are lack of interest, poor concentration, failure to complete tasks and/or homework, unwillingness to cooperate, and being distracting to other students (Dörnyei, 2001). Nevertheless, Csizér and Dörnyei (1998, 2005) argued that language teachers have the power or ability to change these circumstances and transform demotivation into motivation toward language learning. They also asserted that "without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough to ensure student achievement" (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998, p. 203). Therefore, transforming demotivation into motivation is one of the most important challenges that language teachers need to overcome.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research is an interpretative case study of the perceptions and reactions of Spanish-speaking students to motivators and demotivators in the EL classroom. According to

Yin (1981), the case study "attempts to examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context" (p. 59); in this case, the interactions between EL teachers and students, as wells as their interpretation of those interactions were the focus of the study. The study is presented as a microethnography (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) because of the small number of participants (four EL teachers and three former EL students). The main objective of the research was to arrive at substantive conclusions that would allow for a better understanding of the experiences of EL teachers and students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Collection

Two methods of data collection were used in this qualitative study: Individual interviews and a focus group interview. Three college students participated in the study. The students were interviewed together in a focus group session. Individual interviews with four teachers licensed in EL were also conducted. All interactions with the participants were tape-recorded and transcribed in the original language of the recording, and a summary of the main ideas or topics discussed during the interactions was written. The summary of the interviews or the focus group was shared individually with each corresponding participant for member checking, which is the process of sharing the data collected, and the researcher's interpretation of it, with the participants of the study to make sure that their ideas are represented accurately (Creswell, 2005, p. 252). Once participants had corroborated the information, all data were analyzed and organized into a coding system. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described the process of creating a coding system as follows: "You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns" (p. 173). The key words were grouped into codes according to how they relate to each other; the codes were then organized in themes for their discussion.

Research Questions

The study aimed to answer the following question: What motivates or fails to motivate Spanish-speaking students' willingness to learn English? Secondary questions included: What do Spanish-speaking students identify as motivators and demotivators in the EL classroom? What are the experiences in the class that lead to motivation and/or demotivation? What do the students construct as the reasons for being motivated or demotivated by those experiences?

Participants

All participants for this study were chosen through homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). All student participants were college students, age 18 or older. They were former EL students in INPS, and they were native Spanish speakers. One of the students started as a level 2 in kindergarten and reached level 5 by third grade. Another student claimed that she was placed in the EL class because of the Home Language Survey (HLS) and she did not recall being tested before taking the class. She scored at level 5 at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. The third student started second grade at level 1 and he was reclassified as FEP after completing ninth grade. All teacher participants were licensed in EL in K-12 and they were employed in different public schools in the state of Indiana at the time of the study. All forms, including consent forms, were provided in English for the teachers and in English and Spanish for the students.

Limitations

It is pertinent to mention here the specific limitations of this study in order to take them into account for future research. First, while the teachers interviewed referred to their experiences at the moment of data collection, the students participating in the focus group could only provide the information they remembered from the last time they were in an EL class,

which was at least ten years previous. Second, neither the teacher sample nor the student sample was large enough to draw generalizations for either population. The specific limitations of this study only allow for tentative assertions, and further research on this topic is still needed. Replication of this study would need to take into account the limitations listed above. However, having acknowledged that, the experiences of the participants and the analysis of their comments and opinions resulted in various implications for enhancing language instruction in ways that would be most effective for those participating in the teaching and learning of English.

FINDINGS

The information gathered in this study revealed the variety and adaptability required of teachers within EL programs, especially because the specific students' needs and the limitations of time and space are particular to each institution. The data revealed some similarities and dissimilarities in the perception of motivators and demotivators in the EL classroom. Some themes presented themselves repeatedly within and between the two groups of participants, current EL teachers and former EL students.

Emergent Themes across Participants

Language learning was experienced very differently by the teachers and the students. The specific differences became more apparent when participants were asked their opinions about the motivators and demotivators that were present in the EL class. Although none of the teachers or the students in this study had experience with the same program and in the same circumstances, the themes that they perceived as having an effect on language learning are not only similar, but also easy to recognize.

English Language Learning Environment. Three of the four teachers interviewed commented on how important it is for them to create an environment that fosters English

language learning, where their students would feel comfortable enough to take risks and participate eagerly in the different activities. They also mentioned that providing students with a safe environment where they can make mistakes will help them to learn from their mistakes and develop more confidence in all language domains. However, when the students were asked about the classroom environment as a source of motivation, they failed to recognize it as such. Only one of the students mentioned that he liked the EL class because of the sense of belonging that it provided. The student offered this explanation:

> I liked the class because I felt a little bit more comfortable because in the class, you know in my regular class, there were no Hispanics, so I felt like, like it was my house; so, you know, I guess, I don't know, to be happy in there and to be able to stay there I tried harder, but in the end trying harder is what got me out of that class when I tested out of it.

Student-Teacher Relationships. The relationships that the teachers built with their students were deemed as relevant by all four teachers. Teachers reported that it is very important for them to establish positive personal relationships with their students in order to show them that they really care and want them to succeed. One of the teachers said that constantly checking up on the students and letting them know that she expects them to succeed creates a personal connection that really motivates not only EL students but all students in general. Another teacher emphasized the importance of incorporating the students' culture into the classroom because it is very "motivating to really dive into their cultures . . . ask questions about their own cultures, their own traditions, holidays, things that they do with their families." She said that using the students' background in class conversations and activities lets the students know that she cares about them and that she wants to learn from them in the same way that they are

learning from her. She also added that a student's culture "is part of who they are . . . is part of where they came from, so there's a sense of pride" which she utilizes to foster a "sense of respect for all the cultures" and she was very clear to state that "the more you can connect with your students the better."

Interestingly, despite being considered a very important construct of the EL class by the teachers, the student- teacher relationship was not so readily mentioned by the students in the focus group. They were quick to mention their classmates, and whether or not they liked the teacher, but their reasons for not liking a teacher were based on the amount of homework assigned and how boring or difficult some tasks were. When questioned more specifically about their student–teacher relationship, one of the students was quick to say in Spanish that she did not have a relationship at all with her teacher because she was in the EL class for only four months and during that time she did not really need her help. She said that her teacher knew that she did not need help, so she was left to complete her work alone and the teacher spent most of her time helping the other students in the class. Another student offered the following memory:

> My teacher also worked as a counselor and I remember one time . . . since I had lost a brother, my mom had lost a child, and that day I was crying and instead of taking me to the school counselor they took me to my EL teacher and she talked to me and that way. . . I don't know the word I'm looking for, but she was comforting me; so, I liked her after that.

When asked if this situation had an effect on the way he related to his EL teacher, the student said that he "liked" his EL teacher because she "was very nice compared to the others, to the Americans," but he did not make any other comments regarding his relationship with her or his motivation to work harder in the class. The third student described his EL teacher as being very

"rigid" and a "true disciplinarian." According to this student, there were never any songs or games in the class, and the teacher focused mostly on constant practice and repetition, a situation that did not leave much room for different activities or creativity. This scenario, however, changed in high school, when he had a new EL teacher, and he was very eager to explain why.

> In grade school I didn't have a teacher like that, who would do things that were inspirational. It was in high school I did have that teacher that really . . . she made me work really hard. She wouldn't allow me to be lazy. She really made me. What's the American saying? She called me out because I would do the work, I mean I would never complain. I would do the work and I would do it right, but I wouldn't do any extra effort to really do it better. She was the first to really tell me you can do it. You are better than this, so, do it better and that was the push that really I needed.

Although no explicit comment was made by the students about their relationship with their teachers, their reflections and answers indicate that their interactions inside and outside the classroom did have an effect on them. They simply did not acknowledge them as such.

Choice of Task or Reading Material. Giving students choices becomes a motivator to complete tasks, as three of the teachers who participated in the study expressed. The teachers reported that when the students had the opportunity to choose what they wanted to read and how to demonstrate that they had understood the material, they performed better than when they were assigned a specific text and task. One of the teachers also said that the type of activity that the students choose is also an indicator of their understanding and level of comfort with the material. She explained that her classes follow a thematic approach, and all of her activities are built around a single story, i.e. *The Tell-Tale Heart* (Poe, 1843). However, the presentations that the

students have to give in order to demonstrate that they understood the material can be a poster, an essay, a cartoon, a short skit, or even a simple general questionnaire with questions such as: Who are the main characters? What is the plot? What is the climax of the story? The teacher said that depending on how much the students enjoy the story they would do something more elaborate with the material. Interestingly, when most of the students decide to do the general questionnaire, she knows she needs to go back and review something or spend a little bit more time on that particular story. As she explained, the fact that most of the students choose the questionnaire over the other presentation projects is an indication that they are struggling with the story.

None of the students in the focus group recalled having a choice of reading material or assessment tasks and activities in their EL classes. When asked about their opinion on the activities that the teachers mentioned, they reported that if they had been given similar options, they would have probably been more interested in the task and in the content of the reading than they were when they were required to read a specific book. They also said that they would have felt more empowered and more in control of their own learning.

Use of Technology. The use of technology, more specifically computers and the internet in the EL classroom, is a theme that came up in three of the teachers' interviews, but the students in the focus group did not mention it at all. Presumably, this can be explained by the fact that the students were talking about their EL experiences from a time when neither computers nor the internet were so readily available in INPS. Conversely, the teachers were talking about their current experiences. One of the teachers said that having a computer and access to the internet in her class has been very helpful, and she incorporates it in her routine when the students need to do research on a topic or if they need more examples. Another teacher reported that her students

get very excited when they get to work on a project that involves using the computer because it allows them to be creative and to work together. She also said that her class has access to 10-12 iPods, and that she would use those devices sometimes to have the students practice their listening comprehension and pronunciation skills, and because it is a type of technology with which the students are familiar, "they really enjoy any activity that has to do with using the iPods." Because of the gap between the students' last EL class and the time of the interview, the students did not mention the theme of technology use in the classroom as readily as the teachers did. Only one of the students mentioned some sort of technology being used and helpful in the EL class. He said:

> The teacher would always use clips from *Twin Peaks* [Frost, 1990] to teach allegory, examples of literary terms, she would use television or movies to teach, demonstrate sarcasm, allegory, concepts like that.

One of the teachers interviewed and two of the students did not mention using or having access to some form of technology in the EL class.

Peer Scaffolding. Both, teachers and students acknowledged collaboration, social interaction, and mutual support as beneficial and motivating. The teachers believe that if they were to correct every mistake and just focus on the details and provide negative feedback, the students would simply give up. However, when a classmate corrects them they do not seem to mind it at all. On the contrary, they think of it as a game, and they try to be the next to make the correction instead of the one being corrected. Two of the students in the focus group had some experience with peer scaffolding. One of them remembered that sometimes her teacher struggled to help the students who had just arrived in the class with no knowledge of English because she did not know Spanish. In such cases, she and her classmates would help when they could

because they "knew that it is hard when you don't have anyone to help you." Another student also had experience in assisting his peers when the language created a barrier, but the situation he described did not happen in the EL class.

> When I was in seventh grade, they put a group of students that didn't speak English very well in my math class and there was a lady who came to the classes sometimes; but there were times where there was a big need for her help, so she couldn't always be there, in the class with them, so, when she wasn't there I was the one who tried to explain to the students what was going on with the work, and that way when the teacher had a question for them I would translate.

When asked how he felt about doing this, he said that he felt good because he was helping other students who wanted to learn and who were trying to get ahead in life. This student had the role of the "more knowledgeable" one in terms of peer scaffolding, and this collaboration with his peers was motivating to him.

Difficulty of the Task. Two of the teachers and the three students mentioned the effect of the difficulty of a task on students' motivation to learn English. One of the teachers, for example, believes that it is important for the students to experience success in the class because they "continue improving and improving and feel good about it." She also said that if a text or a task is too difficult for the students it makes them think that they "might as well just give up." Similarly, another teacher claimed that one of the characteristics of her class that her students really appreciate is that "they are able to be successful, they can do the work." When her students are struggling with a specific topic or a text, they will break down the content into smaller pieces and rephrase or restate the information to make it easier for all to understand. When asked about factors that make her students not want to learn, the teacher replied that her

students are demotivated "when they feel they can't do it, when they don't get it or they think that they don't get it; it sounds like it's going to be hard." She also said that when her students say that a specific topic or activity "is boring, it really means that it's hard;" so instead of making the topic more exciting, she tries to make it more understandable. This teacher also shared a particular experience she had with a student regarding the level of difficulty of the activity and the student's behavior once the task stopped being challenging.

> What I finally figured out was [that] he was a kid that would do it until he knew he got it and then stopped. He didn't care about a grade; he didn't care what the expectation was. If you gave him 10 questions and he understood it by three he wasn't doing more than three; because he got it, he was done . . . but I knew that if [he] stopped at three, he got it, and I could ask him 50 questions that were related to that and test him and he did get it. So, he was intrinsically motivated enough to learn, but he had a limit.

From the students' perspective, the level of difficulty was also a motivator or a demotivator. One of the students, for instance, recalled being bored in her EL class because she already knew most of the content. She also said that when she was placed in the EL class in high school it was only because of the language spoken at home and not because she really needed the classes to learn English. She claimed that when she started high school she was able to read and write well in English and she did not find her EL class challenging at all, which resulted in her being bored and uninterested in the class. Another student said the EL class was not challenging for him because "being born in the United States and being around the language" made the class feel "normal" because he "already knew most of the stuff." He did recognize that he had "a little bit of trouble" with the English language when he started kindergarten and first grade, mostly

because he was used to speaking only Spanish at home. However, he believed that this initial "shock" was motivating for him because he did not find the class to be difficult and he "caught on really quick." The third student believed that being challenged in the EL class was a big motivator to learn the language. He remembered that he had no problems asking questions or asking for help when he needed it because he was interested, and he really wanted to learn the language. He also mentioned that "growing up in an area where [he] didn't have friends" who spoke Spanish was probably better for him because it forced him to work harder and figure things out on his own. He said that his sister "would help [him] with [his] homework" but his parents were not able to help much with English and being aware of this situation made him work harder in the class.

ANALYSIS

This study provided a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between teachers and students regarding what they consider motivating or demotivating factors to learn English. The specific themes regarding motivation and demotivation that emerged from the data collected were identified for analysis, using the categories of language learning environment, student-teacher relationship, choice of task or reading material, use of technology, peer scaffolding, and difficulty of the task. These themes are considered within larger groupings of similarities and dissimilarities following.

Similarities between and within the Groups of Participants

The analysis of the data collected shows some relevant similarities in the perspectives and opinions of the students and the teachers in the themes of use of technology, peer scaffolding, and difficulty of the task. In the case of use of technology, three of the four teachers and one of the students mentioned the advantages of using some form of technology (video clips,

iPods, computers, or the Internet) to provide examples and extra material relevant to the class. Dörnyei and Csizér's study (1998) supported this finding when they listed "interest" as one of the "commandments" to motivate students. Dörnyei and Csizér further argued that introducing unexpected and exotic elements in the class promotes students' curiosity at the same time that it makes the activity challenging yet enjoyable. The teachers in this study corroborated Dörnyei and Csizér's assertion and they added that the fact that the students are familiar with the technology they use motivates them to work on projects and complete tasks. At the same time, they get to explore and use the technology in very specific ways that they might have not anticipated. Similarly, the student who mentioned the use of video clips in his class added that, because of their use in the class, he began to recognize similar structures and English phrases outside of the class, which he later incorporated into his own language inventory.

Regarding the theme of peer scaffolding, the findings of this study are congruent with Vygotsky's (1987) theory of socio-cultural cognitive development. According to this theory, culture, language, and social interaction are the main elements that precede cognitive development. Vygotsky also argued that peer scaffolding was essential to help individuals navigate from one learning experience to the next. In the specific case of this study, three of the four teachers interviewed reported that their students seemed to perform better and enjoy the different activities when they had the opportunity to work with a classmate. They also stated that they take into account the students' English proficiency levels when pairing them in order to ensure that one of them is more knowledgeable than the other and can help his or her classmate to complete the task, which is an essential element of Vygotsky's theory. Two of the students who participated in the focus group also shared their experiences with peer scaffolding in their corresponding EL classes, and they both expressed that they enjoyed assisting a classmate with

the different activities. It made them feel good to help others who were in the same situation as they were when they started learning English.

Another relevant component of Vygotsky's (1987) theory is the ZPD which requires the level of difficulty of a task to be too high for an individual to complete alone, but that can be successfully accomplished with the assistance of a more knowledgeable peer. Vygotsky and other researchers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Schneider, 2001) agree that it is important for teachers to take into account the level of difficulty of a task because tasks that are too easy for the students are not challenging and therefore uninteresting, and tasks that are too difficult for the students to complete can end up in students' frustration and disappointment. The four teachers interviewed consider that experiencing success in the language classroom is definitely a motivator for their students, and they all emphasized the importance of creating such opportunities in their classes. Likewise, the findings from the students' focus group are also consistent with the research as well as with the opinions from the teachers.

Dissimilarities between and within the Groups of Participants

The data collected in this study also shed light on some important dissimilarities in the perspectives and opinions of the students and the teachers in the themes of language learning environment, student-teacher relationship, and choice of task or reading material. Many experts (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Gardner, 2006) consider the environment or atmosphere of the language class an important component for language learning. This motivator was not only mentioned by the teachers interviewed, but they also emphasized their many efforts to create a welcoming environment in their classroom where their students would feel safe and comfortable to make mistakes, participate, and cooperate with one another. Interestingly, the students who participated in this study did not recognize the environment of their language class

as a motivator. Only one of the students mentioned feeling comfortable in the class, but it was because he was friends with some of his classmates and not because of other aspects of the environment.

A similar situation emerged within the theme of student-teacher relationships. Previous studies by several experts (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2006; Glasser, 1998; Louis, 2009; Oxford, 1998) support the teachers' opinions about the relevance and impact of this relationship. According to the teachers interviewed, having good rapport and creating a good relationship with their students is essential to motivate ELs because then the students perceive the teacher as being "on the same team" as opposed to being an enemy or a rule enforcer. The students of the focus group, however, did not acknowledge this relationship as part of their experience in the EL classroom, not even when specifically asked about it. This finding is relevant because of two reasons. First, in spite of the many efforts of the teachers to create and foster a positive relationship with their students, there is a disconnection between the teachers' efforts and the students' perceptions of those efforts. And second, because the students interviewed had not been in an EL class for at least ten years; therefore, the question here remains as to whether or not current students would have different opinions or if they would also fail to recognize their teachers' efforts to create positive relationships with them.

The theme of choice of task or reading material also constitutes another dissimilarity in the findings because it was mentioned by three of the teachers as one of the motivators they implement in the language class, but the students interviewed did not experience it. According to Glasser (1998), it is pertinent for students to feel that they have at least some control in their academic classes because doing so helps them fulfill their needs of power and fun. Glasser's assertion supports the teachers' argument that when the students get to choose what book to read

or how to present a project, they are more invested in the task than when they are assigned a specific book to read or a specific project to do. Glasser (1998), Holec (1981), and Dickinson (1995) argued that students need to experience ownership of their learning and take responsibility for the decisions they make in the classroom. This exercise of autonomy, however, was not mentioned by the any of the students as part of their experience in the language classroom. Here again, the time gap between the students' last EL class and the focus group for this study constitutes a limitation, and only further research will determine if current EL students exercise choice in their classes and if they experience autonomy and ownership of their learning.

IMPLICATIONS

The information gathered and presented in this study provides a better picture of the EL classroom from the perspectives of those most directly involved, teachers and students. It became evident that EL teachers employ a variety of methods and tools that they believe to promote motivation. As newer and better technologies become available, their use and integration in many classrooms increase. According to the teachers in this study, the use of technology in their classrooms (computers, internet access, iPods, etc.) is always a motivator for EL students. Dörnyei and Csizér explain that these types of devices constitute "interesting supplementary materials" that challenge the students and raise their curiosity because they are "unexpected or exotic elements" (1998). Accordingly, the teachers interviewed reported that ELs always respond positively and they seem to have a more enjoyable experience in the class when they have the opportunity to use and explore these devices. Therefore, in order to enhance the teaching and learning experience, schools need to invest in these emergent technologies and provide teachers and students with more opportunities to interact and become familiar with their applications. Additionally, schools need to support teachers' professional development,

especially when it comes to workshops and conferences focused on the use of these technologies and their many applications in the classroom. This will allow teachers to become more comfortable with the technology that they currently have available, as well as to incorporate new devices that will enhance the teaching and learning experience for them and for their students.

RECCOMENDATIONS

This study has implications for future research in language education as well as motivation and demotivation of Spanish–speaking students to learn English. Conclusions suggest that the environment and the interactions that take place in the language classroom have an impact on the students' willingness to learn English. The motivators and demotivators identified by the participants in the study do not constitute, by any means, an exhaustive list of all the different aspects that play an important role in the academic achievement of language students. Replication of this study using a specific theoretical approach as well as a larger sample of teachers and students would shed more light on the issues that pertain to EL instruction in grades K-12 in Indiana and other places that might experience similar increases in their Spanish–speaking population. Although numerous studies find the relationship between the students and their teachers relevant in creating and promoting motivation (Chambers, 1993; Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Glasser, 1998; Oxford, 1998), little research specifically addresses the students' acknowledgement of this relationship and, even less, its construction and characteristics. Additionally, there is little research on the students' perceptions and characterizations of the language learning environment, the motivators and demotivators that they encounter, and their reaction to them.

The implementation of these recommendations could guide more specialized research in the area of language education and motivation, as the studies and the samples of participants

would be more delimited than in the present study. In addition, the continuous study of motivation and demotivation can increase the understanding of the actions and behaviors that teachers evidence in their practice. This information could help to identify, minimize, eliminate, or even prevent factors that would hinder students' willingness to learn English.

CONCLUSION

The ruling of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), along with later reforms to the school system in the United States, has shaped the education that English language learners receive today. However, as societies evolve, so do the needs of their members and these needs should be taken into account in policy-making. It is a fact that Spanish-speaking students already have an important place within American education. Parrillo (1991) stated that "we live in the midst of profound demographic changes and their subsequent ripple effects" (p. 25). Hence, as schools continue to prepare for such changes they should also continue to provide the resources that all students need in order to succeed. Changes in education can already be seen, but in order to successfully integrate everybody into the American "melting pot," their needs, challenges, and struggles must be understood; and schools must have all the resources available to guarantee that their students are receiving the education they need and deserve.

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