# NECESSITY AS A FACTOR TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE

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**Abstract.** This study analyzes the role of the necessity to learn English as a second language and its impact on students' motivation and performance at the International School of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Unlike other second language classes, students who participated in this study have no prior knowledge of English and knowledge of the English language is necessary to study the rest of the subjects at this secondary school. As a result, these students must learn English not only as part of their academic studies but also to be able to participate actively in the school and the community in which they find themselves. This situation presents a different condition from other classes of second language acquisition and our interest lies in investigating what are the effects of this condition on the process of learning for these students. In order to analyze the role of this necessity, motivation and performance, we designed, administered and analyzed questionnaires, observed classes and longitudinally consulted grades achieved by this subject of English B for the International Baccalaureate (BI) program during the last ten years. The findings found in this study are relevant and have repercussions not only for students similar to these characteristics but for all other classes of second languages as well.

**Keywords:** learning, second languages, necessity, motivation, performance, English, Secondary Education.

# LA NECESIDAD COMO FACTOR PARA APRENDER UNA SEGUNDA LENGUA

**Resumen.** En este estudio se analizan el rol de la necesidad de aprender inglés como segunda lengua y su incidencia en la motivación y el desempeño de alumnos de la escuela internacional de Kuala Lumpur, en Malasia. A diferencia de otras clases de segundas lenguas, los alumnos que participaron de este estudio no cuentan con un conocimiento previo de inglés y la lengua de inglés es necesaria para estudiar el resto de las asignaturas en la escuela secundaria. A su vez, estos estudiantes deben aprender inglés no solamente como parte de sus estudios académicos sino también para poder participar de manera activa en la escuela y la comunidad en la que se encuentran. Esta situación presenta una condición diferente a otras clases de adquisición de segundas lenguas y nuestro interés radica en indagar cuáles son los efectos de esta condición en el aprendizaje de estos alumnos. Con

el fin de analizar el rol de la necesidad, la motivación y el desempeño, diseñamos, administramos y analizamos cuestionarios, observamos clases y consultamos de manera longitudinal las calificaciones logradas por esta asignatura de inglés B del programa del Bachillerato Internacional (BI) en los últimos diez años. Los hallazgos encontrados en este estudio son relevantes y tienen repercusiones no solamente para un alumnado similar a estas características sino para todas las clases de segundas lenguas también.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje, segundas lenguas, necesidad, motivación, desempeño, inglés, Educación Secundaria.

## Introduction

The research question proposed to be investigated in this study is the following: to what extent is need a motivational factor in learning English as a second language and how does it influence and impact on student performance?

Often, need is understood as the lack of that which is necessary to achieve a purpose. In this study, need is observed in those students who lack proficiency in English as a second language in a context where it is necessary not only to meet academic requirements but also to develop their social and emotional life.

Usually, in second language learning, need has been studied under the following prisms: communicative, learning, objective, and subjective needs. Communicative need is understood as the act of using the language with the aim of obtaining a purpose through the communicative act. In turn, learning needs are understood as "the gap between the learner's current state of knowledge and that which he/she aspires to achieve at the end of the course" (CVC, 2020). On the other hand, objective needs were identified by Richterich (1983) as those based on the social, cultural, and educational conditions of the learners, their level of competence in the language they are going to study, and the use they will have to make of that language or the purposes for which they are learning it. The same Richterich (1983), lastly, identifies subjective needs as those related to learning factors such as personal factors (affective and cognitive) of the learners.

These needs can be observed in the context of this study which is the International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL), Malaysia, secondary level, with students aged 16-18 years old. These students learn English as a second language because they must do so out of both objective and subjective necessity. This is a need that can be considered authentic and real, with measurable aims and objectives outside the purely academic. In this context, objective needs are closely related to subjective needs because the situation in which the learners find themselves directly affects their goals and their personal factors.

In other words, the learners in this study differ from other second language learners in that their objective and subjective needs are linked to the fact that they are in a context where communication and participation in the community is not possible without proficiency in English.

This need is common to many immigrants and refugees who move to another country. Therefore, our interest lies in investigating how this need has implications for learners'

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motivation and whether there is a measurable effect on learners' performance in acquiring a second language.

### The Role of need and motivation

Among the key factors cited in various studies for learning a second language, the following are commonly mentioned: intelligence (Gardner, 1983); motivation (Dörnyei, 1994); aptitude (Carroll, 2002); self-efficacy (Conti & Smith, 2016). Interestingly, none of them discuss how these factors are related to the need to learn a second language.

As Canale (1983, p. 42) explains, "a communicative approach must be based on, and responsive to, the (often changing) needs and interests of learners." Canale highlights "the (often changing) needs" of learners. It is therefore necessary to define the construct of communicative need as a biological need that goes beyond the language being learned. It is not considered as a factor in itself that has measurable and verifiable implications for the process of learning a second language on its own. This is due to various reasons such as the difficulty of defining this concept, the degree of variability within it, and even the difficulty of separating it from other factors.

For this reason, in delineating need as a key factor in second language learning, this study focuses on the role of this concept in relation to motivation. Although it is only one of many components of human behavior, several researchers such as Dörnyei (2001) and Gardner (2006) have identified motivation as a determinant of successful second language acquisition. As Schunk (2012, p. 23) explains, "motivation can affect all phases of learning and performance."

### Working hypothesis

Schumann (1976, p. 45), regarding motivation, says, "this need common to all immigrants is resolved in different ways depending on age, motivation, expectations, or even the perception of the new society." Consequently, as a working hypothesis, we propose that this need to learn English as a second language has no effect on the motivation to learn a second language. Because of this, the following doubts arise:

- Is there a difference between a student who studies a second language to broaden his or her knowledge of the world? And one who does it out of the need to be able to communicate in the place where he or she is?

- Are these differences, if any, measurable to differentiate the two students from each other, and if so, do they have a measurable positive effect?

- Can we learn something about how to proceed so that this real and authentic communicative need can have positive effects in a typical school context where this learning is often seen as artificial and tedious?

### Necessity and motivation in second language acquisition

When investigating the need and motivation as factors in the acquisition of a second language, Dimitroff, Dimitroff, and Alhashimi (2018) address this same issue in contexts different from ours, but with a similar approach. The aforementioned authors conducted a study

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in which they distinguish the domain of English as a second language from English as a foreign language in order to identify the role of motivation in each of the two contexts.

The authors start from the assumption that the context of study of a second language is better than that of a foreign language and facilitates the learning of a foreign language. This assumption is confirmed in their studies, although the results are not entirely conclusive because there are other relevant factors such as the role of the teacher and the attitudes of the learners; aspects that cannot be ignored or completely isolated.

Another study of the same nature by Chen, Warden, and Chang (2005), shows that the incentives to study English in a context where English is a foreign language will usually be lower than in a context where English is a second language. Therefore, these authors mention that the first thing to do would be to understand the "local realities" of learners before applying results from other motivational studies from different parts of the world (p. 611).

Adwani and Shrivastava (2017, p. 159) refer to motivation as "the neglected heart of language teaching." The results of their research make us see that all learning activities are filtered through learners' motivation. Dörnyei (2001) mentions that motivation provides the primary impetus for initiating second language learning and later becomes the force that sustains this arduous and tedious process. In fact, according to the author, all other factors involved in language acquisition depend to some extent on motivation.

Maslow (1991) makes the union of the concepts of motivation and need by defining the first as the impulse that every human being has to satisfy their needs. The author then classifies these needs in a hierarchical way starting from the most basic. The result is as follows: physiology (e.g. breathing, food), security (physical, family), affiliation (friendship, affection), recognition (trust, respect), and self-realization (morality, creativity).

Taking the above into account, we ask ourselves the following question: Where does second language learning fit into these needs? The answer would be that, in school contexts where students study a second language as part of their academic training, they could be found in recognition and self-fulfillment. Therefore, needs that are not considered by Maslow (1991) as basic. However, there are cases such as the context of study in which this research is situated where learning a second language is associated with needs for security and affiliation which, according to Maslow (1991), would be situated at the top of his scale.

To better understand the relationship of the roles of motivation and needs, we can use Dörnyei's (2001) definition of motivation as a general term used to refer to the antecedents (causes and origins) of an action. Why do our students in schooling contexts learn a second language? In the answer to this question lies one of the keys to understanding the role of motivation:

In language acquisition classes where the motivation is almost exclusively academic, the need to learn a second language is not the same as in the students in this study. The need and motivation of these students is reflected in the fact that they have no other way of communicating in the society in which they participate both in and out of school.

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In order to obtain a greater depth in this concept we are going to base ourselves on the investigations of Lambert and Gardner (1972) who make a key differentiation between two types of motivation, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation.

The integrative motivation occurs when the learner wishes to learn the language because of the interest that the culture arouses in him/her. This promotes a positive attitude and generates a possible objective which is to integrate into that social group.

Instrumental motivation occurs for utilitarian purposes, for example, to have a better chance of finding a job or obtaining higher qualifications.

Gardner (2006) argues that integrative motivation has a more lasting impact and is directly related to success. Sánchez, Navarro, and García (2007) also support the notion that students who are instrumentally motivated seem to be guided more by external aspects, such as various types of incentives that are less stable in nature.

The research that we have just mentioned has numerous detractors that we will enumerate below. In the first place, Au (1988) states in his study that there are somewhat conflicting results and to confirm this, he relies on the study of Gardner and Lambert (1972) when they explain that while in the bilingual context of Montreal in Canada, an integrative orientation is closely related to the learning of French, on the other hand, in the Philippines, an instrumental orientation seems to be more useful when it comes to learning English.

In this regard, Gardner (2010) states that his argument does not propose that the integrative orientation is more advantageous than the instrumental orientation but, rather, that students who are integrally motivated are more likely to achieve higher proficiency than those who are not. Researchers, such as Burstall et al. (1974), mention that both orientations contribute to the success of foreign language learners in the UK.

In conclusion, Dörnyei (2001) states that without "adequate motivation," even for learners with high proficiency skills and abilities, it is impossible for them to achieve long-term goals.

This statement mentioned by Dörnyei leads us to ask the following question in relation to the link between need and motivation: Is the need demonstrated in our study to learn a second language part of "adequate motivation"?

Part of the answer to this question is found in the study of Tae-Young (2009) who mentions that, the need to learn a second language is an "adequate motivation" only when the initial motive is embedded in specific learning goals and their own sense of participation in these goals. The results of her study showed that, in order to facilitate learning, learners had to internalize their own needs for themselves and transform them into what would be "the ideal of themselves in relation to this second language."

Finally, Androulakis, Mastorodimou, and van Boeschoten (2016) reaffirm that knowledge of the local language is an essential tool for immigrants and refugees in order to improve their socio-economic situation. If we extrapolate this statement to the specific context of our students, learning English as a second language becomes both an integrative and an instrumental necessity.

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## Method

### Participants

The participants of this study are 42 ESL learners (28 females and 14 males) from various nationalities (though predominantly from Korea), studying at the International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL), Malaysia, and whose average time of their study duration is 3 years. Some generalities of the study population are as follows:

- A large number of them are in Malaysia for purely economic reasons.

- They have already acquired an adequate level of literacy.

- The main reason of their studies is to get good grades so that they can get into a university of some prestige outside Malaysia (USA, Europe, and Korea).

- The level of our students can be classified as B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the International Baccalaureate (IB).

- These students study in English B class on a compulsory basis as they lack the necessary level to take other classes taught in English for native speakers.

### Study Schedule

The study that we now present was carried out during 6 weeks from the beginning of February until mid-March 2020. For this work we formed two working groups with the same teacher and identical material. The first thing we did was to review the state of the art concerning learning factors, especially the need to learn a second language and the motivational factor. Next, we selected a specific learner profile who had a need to communicate in English as a second language in order to discover the extent of this need. Finally, we administered the data collection instruments and then analyzed the data.

### Method of analysis

This study belongs to an exploratory research context that seeks to determine the nature of the problem and investigate the questions. It intends to explore the educational context at the International School of Kuala Lumpur (ISKL), Malaysia, with students from diverse backgrounds, who study English as a second language out of necessity.

To achieve this objective, a methodological triangulation has been carried out in order to obtain a multifaceted view of the students' motives, efforts, commitment, and results. The data collection instruments have been the following:

- A motivation questionnaire (mostly quantitative in nature).

- Informal discussions and classroom observations (qualitative in nature).

- A study of ratings over time (quantitative in nature).

As this is an exploratory case study, we sought to carry out a systematic and empirical investigation without deliberately manipulating variables where we could observe phenomena as they occur in their natural context for subsequent analysis.

On the other hand, in order to have data for a purely quantitative analysis, we obtained longitudinal data from the intermediate level ESL groups over the last 10 years. To this end, we contrasted the grades obtained and with other grades at the same level of learning of other languages, whose students are studying second languages as part of their IB curriculum fulfilling compulsory academic requirements.

### Data Collection

We used the same online questionnaire for all participants and this was composed of 2 items on motivation and 2 items on attitudes. We took Kim's (2009) questionnaire as a model and the participants received it via email using Google forms. Participants' personal information and information about participants' reflections on learning experiences and on motivation are the two parts into which we divided our questionnaire. The first part had four demographic questions: age, gender, country of origin, and purpose of study (the results of these four questions are already mentioned in section 5.1 participants).

The section related to information about students' learning experiences and motivation contained three questions. The first one was about students' motivation in learning English as a second language. For this question we used a Likert scale ranging from "not motivated" to "very motivated." The second was an open-ended question that required ranking the level of importance of motivations for learning English. The third was a rating scale of the level of involvement in learning. Also for this question we used a Likert scale with a range from "never" to "always." Finally, the fourth was an open-ended question and asked the students for a list to answer the following question, "what are the factors that determine that a language class is stimulating?"

### Analysis of results

As Kim and Kim (2006) mention, the status of English as a global language implies the ability to communicate not only with native speakers but also with non-native speakers of English around the world. While a clear goal of communicative need is deduced from this statement, within the context of English as a second language, several goals coexist at the same time.

The first of these is academic competence. Kang (2009) mentions that, in the context of our study (Asia), English test scores are the decisive factor for university entrance, job opportunities, as well as job promotion. Hence, we can state that this objective is part of instrumental motivation.

Another important goal to highlight is the desire for integration. Gardner and Lambert (1972) show that this goal is key to success in second language learning. Their studies are based on the assumption that a positive attitude leads to more active engagement. Therefore, the learners' desire to learn a second language in order to be assimilated into the community is the driving force behind the achievement of this goal. Consequently, we can see that the motivation in this case is not only instrumental but also integrative of personal and emotional development.

Taking into account this referential framework of Gardner and Lambert (1972), we were not surprised to see in the first part of our questionnaire answers like the ones we offer below

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when answering the question about why students study English as a second language. Some of the representative responses were as follows:

- "I study English for my future and to be able to communicate with people from different countries and learn something different from my home country by being in an international environment."

- "I study English because I have to, it's important for my future."

- "I study English so I can study at an international school, which can benefit me to go to a university in the future."

- "I study English because it is a requirement for universities in South Korea. Moreover, it is the only language I can speak beyond my mother tongue."

If we analyze them together with the totality of the 42 answers to this question, we can observe different traits of what Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified as integrative as well as instrumental motivation. Therefore, we can highlight that these answers show a balance in this group of students.

In the second part of the questionnaire dedicated to measuring the degree of motivation and their attitudes, the first question was the following: "How do you feel as an English learner?" The possible answers ranged from "not motivated" (1) to "very motivated" (5). The results show that half of the students (21) responded with a 3 on the Likert scale; somewhere in between not motivated and very motivated. 16.7 percent of the students (7 students) responded with a 4 on the Likert scale, while the other 33.3 percent of the students (14 students) responded to be very motivated as shown in the graph below (Figure 1).
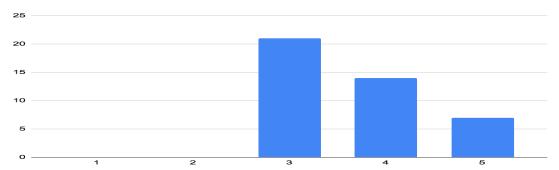


*Figure 1.* Results of the questionnaire where 1 means "not motivated" and 5 means "very motivated" in relation to the number of students who chose the qualification.

When analyzing these data we can visualize a positive tendency that, although it diminishes as greater motivation is identified, in its totality it has results that demonstrate that the students identify themselves with scales that go from "motivated" to "very motivated" and that there is an absence of demotivation.

The next question was: "Does learning English give you any feelings? If yes, please specify which one(s)." Virtually all of the responses (92.2 percent in total) identified with the feeling they produce for me is "feeling motivated." It should be noted that none of the responses included negative feelings. Those students who related "feeling motivated" as a feeling related

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to learning English are demonstrating a positive feeling of encouragement and interest in the subject, a fact that coincides with the results of the previous question.

This coincidence is particularly relevant because it is related to the development of positive attitudes towards the class and its objectives. Even in terms of self-efficacy we can observe that students who identify themselves in such a way are often the same ones who have a high level of motivation. As Pan and Yang (2010) state, a high level of motivation leads to favorable attitudes towards language learning and this has a positive correlation with success in second language learning, as reflected by the absence of negative feelings in our survey.

Continuing with our survey and ordering the level of importance of the motivations for studying English on a scale from least to most important, we can see the following results (Figure 2):
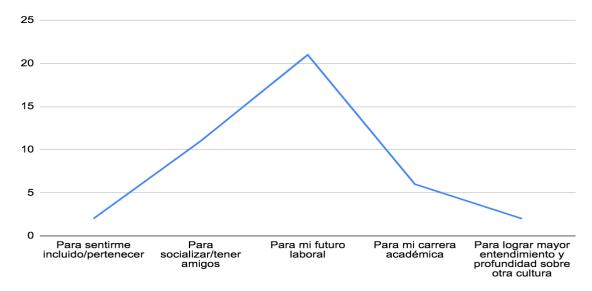


*Figure 2.* Results of the questionnaire where the level of importance of the objectives of studying English as a second language is ranked.

These results are not surprising in terms of instrumental motivation as the majority of students chose "for my future job" as the most important factor for learning English. A surprising fact is to see that the two extremes of the table, factors of "to feel included/belong" and "to gain greater understanding and depth about another culture" were the least chosen by the students. This fact leads us to think that the desire to broaden students' sensitivity for target cultures lacks interest in the learning process of these students.

One possible interpretation of these responses lies in the fact that both factors imply an attitude that goes beyond the merely instrumental and that in turn requires more effort than the merely pragmatic. However, the fact that the factors of "socializing/having friends" and "my academic career" have received a greater number of votes is related to the fact that both have a greater identification with the instrumental one.

The data so far analyzed reveal very interesting data since, in other language classes in similar academic contexts, but where the language being studied is circumscribed to a classroom reality and almost exclusively academic, the factor of "gaining greater understanding and depth about another culture" represents a key factor and objective. This is clearly not the case in the English language study context of our research because the students' need is broader

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than purely academic and is clearly identified with socialization (integrative motivation) and academic career (instrumental motivation).

The following figure (Figure 3) informs us about their self-assessment of their level of engagement in learning English:
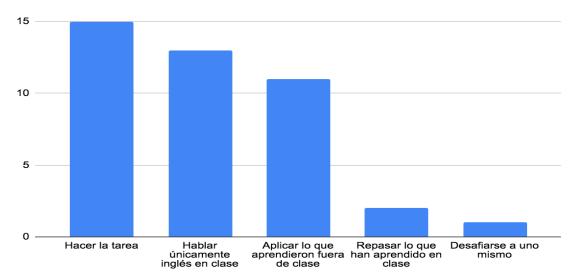


*Figure 3.* Results of the questionnaire showing the level of involvement in the tasks performed to learn English as a second language.

When analyzing these results we can see that most of the students use the language to do homework, to speak only English in class, and to apply what they have learned outside the classroom. The last two items ("reviewing what has been learned" and "challenging oneself") have not been significantly selected. Although doing homework requires instrumental motivation, it is not significant as it can be found in any language class. The factor of "applying what they learned outside of class" is what differentiates this class from any other language class in general, having the need to socialize and interact with the outside world. This is an advantage worth recognizing for the level of involvement of the students as well as the learning process.

In the last section of the questionnaire, the question, "What makes learning English stimulating?", the most representative examples found are:

- "It allows us to have a much wider variety of global opportunities, and I feel like I've accomplished something when I do my homework and notice that I've improved."
- "It's really the need to learn English and the pressure of reality (no friends, in a totally new environment). This has pushed me to learn English. Personally, I don't have any special feelings because it's the right thing to do and what I have to do and I have no other choice."
- "My English class was really fun and exciting. We did a lot of activities that required my involvement, and I feel that I have used my time in a meaningful way. In turn, it allows you to communicate with other people."

These responses confirm the trend shown throughout the questionnaire and demonstrate consistency with what was expressed above. It is of utmost importance to highlight

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communicative aspects, future opportunities, the role of necessity, and meaningful involvement as priority factors. The most striking response is the one that states the following, "it is the right thing to do and what I have to do and I have no other choice," which is a clear differentiation from the reality of any other language class and confirms the role of necessity in learning this language. Thus objective and subjective needs are subject to each other by a mutual influence.

When contrasting the grades over 10 years for this subject with other second language classes in the ISKL school, these longitudinal grades do not show a high variation or variety and when confronted with the global average of grades for the same IB subject, we can observe that there are no variations either. The global average in those same years for the same exam is 5.75/7, while for our school it has been 5.77 out of a possible 7 points. These results are encouraging in terms of final grade; however, it is similar to what happens in other foreign language classes such as Spanish or French in our school. One possible explanation for these results is that they are subject to more factors than just motivation.

This multiplicity of benchmarks revealed through the questionnaire and the longitudinal analysis of the ratings offers us an opportunity to understand the roles of need and motivation as key factors in learning a second language. Down below, we will analyze their possible implications and strategies in terms of their effect on students' learning.

## Discussion

This study has investigated the role of the need to learn English as a second language in a group of students who, without the opportunity to learn this language, would not be able to meet their academic requirements, nor would they be able to participate actively in the community in which they find themselves. In this study we investigate how this need has implications for students' motivation and investigate whether there is a measurable effect on students' performance in acquiring a second language.

The results of the questionnaires show that the need to study this language leads learners to have a high level of both instrumental and integrative motivation. However, the results of our research are not conclusive to the extent that we can say that this need leads learners to perform better when acquiring a second language. This is because there are many other factors which come into play in this process and which cannot be ignored, nor can they be isolated or left out.

In spite of all this, a positive effect on the need to learn a language can still be observed if we want to measure learners' motivation, as this study demonstrates. We have assumed that the need to learn a language is directly related to the need to fulfill academic requirements, and that social and affective issues had no effect on the language learning process. However, we have clearly demonstrated that the need has a measurable and verifiable effect despite various difficulties and/or ambiguities.

It is clear that teachers without analysis of the individual needs of each learner run the risk of treating all learners as a uniform mass and imparting knowledge in a single way and without the ability to differentiate. Second language instruction is often viewed, explained, and

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analyzed from the point of view of practitioners, teachers, and researchers. It is time to engage learners with their different realities as well. As Schunk (2012, p. 58) explains, "working more on neurophysiological research on the variables of motivation and self-regulation will help to eliminate the gap between education and neuroscience." Byrnes and Fox (1998).

When they arrive in Malaysia, many students find themselves in a complex situation that does not allow them to integrate into school and social life. The result is a low level of affective anxiety, low self-esteem, and low willpower. However, learning English as a second language is the way out of this situation. Therefore, it is important to reaffirm the need to understand and analyze the local realities of the students in order to deal with them and to bring about positive attitudes towards study and a high level of motivation in students with these needs.

### *Limitations*

Before concluding, it is important to highlight the limitations of this study. These limitations provide important information not only for the interpretation of the results but also for future research in the same area.

The three most important limitations in this study are the following: the time devoted to the study, the data collection tools, the impossibility of seeing changes in responses, and identifying processes that are dynamic.

First, the time devoted to the study was insufficient. A period of 6 weeks (which we used in our study) is relatively short to be able to detect changes in the nature and magnitude of motivation. More time to conduct the study could help us to see more clearly the evolution of the reasons why students may be faced with the need to study English as a second language and how these affect motivation levels.

Regarding the choice of instruments to measure motivation, this aspect entails difficulties related to a concept that is abstract, impossible to observe in a direct way, inconsistent, and therefore prone to temporal variations. As Dörnyei (2001) explains, motivation is a multidimensional concept, and its measurement is prone to represent a segmented part of an intricate psychological construct.

However, the data collection tools may have been incomplete in terms of the questions included or simply insufficient to measure aspects of the influence of the need to learn a language and the effects on motivation. A greater number of questions could have been added relating to classroom activities, the role of the teacher, the particular goals of each learner, learner beliefs and characteristics, and so on.

Finally, regarding the dynamic characteristic and the temporal variation of attributes such as motivation, we can mention that the main limitation of this study has been that the data obtained only represent a moment in time and do not admit changes. For future similar studies it would be very important to study the results of the questionnaires over time to identify and analyze possible changes.

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