The Development of Student Motivation to Learn English at a University in Mexico

Peter Reilly
Dr., Universidad Panamericana, Campus Aguascalientes, Mexico, *preilly@up.edu.mx*

Although English language competence is directly linked to better job opportunities and an improved quality of life in Mexico, relatively few Mexicans (5-14%) can communicate effectively in English. Research of the Mexican educational system has suggested that outdated teaching methods contribute to a lack of student motivation, which negatively impact learning. This study sought to identify Mexican English learners' perception of five factors associated with motivation to learn. To that end, a self-report questionnaire was completed by 240 Mexican university students. The factors explored that influence the learning process were empowerment, usefulness, success, interest, and caring in their English classes. The findings revealed that learners experienced relatively higher levels of usefulness, success, and caring in their classes, and lower levels of empowerment and interest. Furthermore, females and low achievers reported significantly lower levels of various components. It was concluded, first, that Mexican EFL students experience different levels of the five factors associated with motivation, a finding that can guide teachers to make improvements in the teaching and learning process. Second, because females and low achievers are at a disadvantage, motivationally speaking, it is essential that English teaching professionals respond to the needs of these two cohorts.

Keywords: motivation to learn, English as a foreign language, gender differences, achievement differences, MUSIC model of motivation

INTRODUCTION

English language competence in Mexico is associated with better job opportunities and higher salary (Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, MIS, 2015). Therefore, it is unfortunate that relatively few Mexicans (5-14%) can speak English well (British Council, 2015: 14%; Campos, 2013: 11%; MIS, 2015: 5%). What prompted this study was that 30% of students at one university in Central Mexico do not graduate because they fail to meet the institution's English language requirement, which is a B2 level on the Common European Framework or 550 points on the TOEFL. This university was selected as the site for this study because it is the author's primary place of employment.

Researchers have suggested that causes for low English proficiency in Mexico include low student motivation (Borjian, 2015). However, motivation to learn has not been examined at this university. Furthermore, one gap in the literature is that, to date, there has been no study of English language (EL) learner motivation in Mexico. If EL teaching professionals at this university understood their students' motivation to learn, it could lead them to adjust their teacher strategies and thereby improve learning. It is not suggested here that improving English learning depends solely on motivation, however, the importance of this variable cannot be understated. This study takes one step in that direction by identifying EL learners' experience of factors that contribute to motivation to learn. The framework used to examine their motivation was the MUSIC model of student motivation (Jones, 2009), which consists of five components (empowerment, usefulness, success, interest, and caring learning environments). This study also aimed to determine whether different types of learners (i.e., genders; high vs. low achievers) differ in their perceptions of those components. Although the study was limited to learners at one university, the findings may have implications for other schools in Mexico.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors that Negatively Impact EFL Learning in Mexico

The low percentage of Mexicans that can communicate in English is disheartening because the average salary for monolingual, Spanish-speaking workers is low—about 290 dollars per month (*El Financiero*, 2017). This income is not enough for families to live well on. It is also surprising because EFL study is required in Mexico during nine years of compulsory schooling. It is important to note that 91% of primary and secondary students attend public schools (Public Education Secretariat, 2017); the remaining 9% are enrolled in private, bilingual schools. The latter sector typically hires well-prepared English teachers, and their English language programs work with respected organizations such as Cambridge University and the British Council to train teachers, administer exams, and certify students. Most public schools do not have these benefits.

Borjian (2015) shed light on this situation by interviewing 76 public school EFL teachers in Mexico. He concluded that: (1) almost half of Mexican EFL teachers report that learners display a lack of interest; (2) learners believe the language is too complicated; and (3) methods and curricula are overly traditional, i.e., are teacher centered and grammar focused. Furthermore, compared with other OECD countries, Mexico has the highest student-teacher ratio in primary (28 students per teacher) and secondary education (30 students per teacher) (OECD, 2015). Third, almost half of the secondary teachers report that more than 10% of their students demonstrate disruptive behaviors that interrupt learning (Moriconi & Belanger, 2015). In addition to reducing instruction time (Sun & Shek, 2012), student misbehavior contributes to teacher stress (Aldrup et al., 2018), burnout (Güneş & Uysal, 2019), and depersonalization of relationships (Benita et al., 2018), and is therefore detrimental to learning and performance.

Other OECD (2015) findings reveal that there are extreme differences in achievement between students from developed and developing countries, especially in Latin America. First language (L1) reading comprehension scores from the PISA exam of 15-year-olds from the six Latin American countries fall below the median of the 69 OECD participant countries. Mexican students rank 56th out of 69 participant countries in L1 reading (OECD, 2015); therefore, it is not surprising that second language achievement is low as well. Additionally, the OECD (2015) has reported that female students perform more poorly than males in math and science. Further, women are three times more likely to be *neither in education nor employed* (NEET) than men in the 15-24 age range (37% to 11%, respectively) (OECD, 2018). Curiously, there have been no studies in Mexico regarding gender differences in EFL learning. Because of the link between motivation, learning, and achievement (Bolkan & Griffin, 2018), it is valuable to ascertain whether Mexican learners—especially females—reveal distinct levels of perception of motivational aspects of their English language classes. Although females are traditionally influenced by their mothers' and grandmothers' tendency to marry young and forgo the workforce (Camarena Adame et al., 2014), organizations are currently urging educational institutions to develop strategies that promote greater opportunities for females (Latin American Economic Commission, CEPAL, 2014). This study intends to respond to the call by Camarena Adame et al. (2014) to increase the understanding of females' motivation to learn English, thereby improving their educational and employment opportunities.

Considering the lower achievement in developing nations such as Mexico, Zhao et al. (2008) suggested that institutions and educators examine, adapt, and benefit from the effective practices being implemented in developed countries, thereby narrowing the gap in achievement between countries. Such comparisons help educators identify weaknesses and strengthen their educational system. This study responds to the recommendations of Zhao et al. (2008) by using the MUSIC model of motivation, developed in the United States, to understand Mexican EFL learners' motivations.

Motivation and Second Language Learning

Defining motivation

Dornyei (2005) explained that motivation includes three aspects. It refers to *why* people decide to do something, *how hard* they try to do it, and *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity. For a challenging, prolonged-learning activity such as second language learning, motivation would certainly seem to be necessary.

A brief history of motivation and second language learning

Fifty years ago, two Canadian psychologists, Gardener and Lambert (1972) researched the reasons for students taking up second language learning. They concluded that learners expressed two types of attitudes toward L2 learning. First, an *integrative orientation* referred to the learner's positive view of members of second language group. In Canada at that time, this meant that native English speakers wished to understand and communicate with French-speaking Canadians, and vice versa. Second, an *instrumental orientation* referred to learners who were interested in speaking the L2 for practical purposes such as earning a higher salary or obtaining a better job.

Over the following decades, researchers have broadened our understanding of L2 motivation. They have borrowed and adapted ideas from the fields of psychology and education. For example, Williams and Burden (1997) explored the role of internal factors such as intrinsic interest and sense of agency, and external factors including the learning environment and the role of significant others (e.g., parents, teachers). Also, Reilly (1997, 2001) researched the role of specific teaching strategies such as goal-setting and empathic listening to enhance EL learner motivation. The current study is like the work by these researchers in that they each were based on insights from fields outside of second language teaching and learning.

Perhaps the most influential researcher and writer on L2 learner motivation has been Zoltan Dornyei (Dornyei & Muir, 2019). He has described both motivational theories and the practical implications for the classroom. Specifically, he discusses how teachers can create motivating classroom conditions, how they can generate initial motivation, how they can maintain it, and how they can encourage positive reflections about the language learning experience.

Motivation affects learning and achievement

Motivation to learn has been linked to many aspects of effective learning and performance (Bolkan & Griffin, 2018). It essentially energizes students and directs their behavior toward learning goals (Dornyei & Muir, 2019), increases attention (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2010), promotes self-control and grit (Duckworth & Gross, 2014), is linked to learning strategy use (Schunk et al., 2008), and, consequently, improves academic achievement (Mazer, 2013).

The MUSIC model of motivation (MUSIC model; Jones, 2009, 2016) was designed to help educators engage students in learning. The model posits that teachers need to ensure that students (1) feel *eMpowered* through the ability to make decisions about some aspects of their learning, (2) understand why what they are learning is *Useful* for their short- or long-term goals, (3) believe that they can *Succeed* if they put forth the effort required, (4) are *Interested* in the content and instructional activities, and (5) believe that the instructor and others in the learning environment *Care* about their learning and about them as people (Jones, 2009, 2015). Although this model has been used to improve university courses, including EFL, in different parts of the world (e.g., Li et al., 2016), it has not yet been applied in Mexico.

Measuring motivation to learn

The measurement of student motivation and engagement has been examined by numerous researchers in different parts of the world. Cohorts include middle school science students from the U.S. and Iceland (Chittum et al., 2017), medical students in Iran (Manee et al., 2017), student pharmacists (Pace et al., 2016), music students (Parkes et al., 2017), and engineering students (Tendhar et al., 2017). The MUSIC Inventory (Jones, 2009) has been translated into numerous languages and was back translated from English to Spanish for use in this study.

Amidst the plethora of research based on the MUSIC model, the specific focus on gender differences has been limited. Jones et al. (2013) found that females reported experiencing higher levels of usefulness, success, and interest than did male students

when taking a university course on personal health. Gender differences in reported motivation is an important topic, considering that, in Mexico, there has traditionally been a gender gap in education (OECD, 2015) and employment participation (Camarena Adame et al., 2014) favoring males.

Considering the impetus for the current study was low achievement in EFL learning in Mexico, this research seeks to identify differences in perceptions of the MUSIC components between high and low achievers. Tan (2017) discovered that low-achieving EFL learners in China reported lower motivation to learn than high achievers, but similar research has not been carried out in Mexico.

In sum, although English language competence is vital for a higher quality of life, it has shown to be an obstacle for most Mexicans. This study explores how distinct cohorts (i.e., genders; high and low achievers) differ in their perceptions of the five MUSIC components in EFL classes. Findings may guide future research regarding teaching strategies designed to enhance motivation to learn EFL, and thereby increase the performance of potentially vulnerable cohorts.

The Present Study

Research questions

Three research questions guided this study. Given that Li et al. (2016) discovered differences in English language learners' perceptions of the five components of the MUSIC model in China, it was hypothesized that Mexican English language learners' perceptions of each of the five components would differ as well. Consequently, the first research question was: *Do EFL university students in Mexico perceive different levels of the five MUSIC components in their classes?*

Considering the OECD (2015) finding that males traditionally outperform females academically in Mexico, and performance is linked to motivation to learn (Schunk et al., 2008), it was hypothesized that males would report higher levels of the five components than females. Therefore, the second research question was: *Do male and female EFL students differ in their perceptions of the five components of the MUSIC model?*

Furthermore, because motivation has been linked to academic achievement in different contexts (Schunk et al., 2008), it is valuable to determine whether this is true for EFL learners in Mexico as well. Considering Tan's (2017) finding that low-achieving EFL learners reported lower motivation to learn than high achievers, a similar result was hypothesized for this study. Hence, to examine this, the third research question was: *Do high- and low-achieving students differ in their perceptions of the five components of the MUSIC model?*

METHOD

Participants

This study included 240 EFL students from a private university in Central Mexico. They included 109 women (45.4%) and 131 men (54.6%) with a mean age of 19.7 years (SD = 1.34). Most students were Mexican (n = 237, 98.7%), while 3 (1.3%) participants self-reported being international students from another Latin American country. The reported academic level of the participants reflected students in their freshman (n = 190;

79.1%), sophomore (n = 40; 16.6%), junior (n = 8; 3.3%), and senior (n = 2; 0.8%) years. Participants were distributed among basic (n = 56; 23.3%), intermediate (n = 70; 29.2%), and advanced (n = 114; 47.5%) English levels of the program. Participants were enrolled in one of four different schools within the university: business (35%), engineering (30%), education (20%), and law (15%). Students reported studying five hours of English per week, for a total of 80 hours per semester. A standard communicative, four-skill textbook was used in each of the seven levels of the programs. A score of 550 on the paper based TOEFL was a graduation requirement for the students. Spanish was the L1 of all but 3 students.

Procedure

During the first month of the Spring 2018 semester, 268 students were asked to participate in a study concerning their language learning experience. Two-hundred and forty (89.6%) completed a Spanish version of the MUSIC Inventory, which had been back-translated from English to Spanish and back to English to maximize its validity.

Data Analysis

In addition to descriptive analysis, paired t-tests were used to determine whether the means of the five components reported by subjects significantly differed. Cronbach's alpha values were computed as a measure of the internal consistency reliability of the scales. Then, to determine whether there were differences in the means of the five components between genders and high and low achievers, independent t-tests were calculated. The test for significance was set at .01 to address the problem of multiple comparisons. Cohen's *d* was used to determine effect sizes, with the cutoffs set at small (0.20), medium (0.50), and large (0.80). Statistical analysis was carried out using Excel (2013). To compare the reports of high and low achievers, the former were defined as students who obtained a 70 or above as their final grade in their EFL course, and the latter below a 70. Final grades in the courses were based on a written exam (60%), oral production test (30%), and homework (10%).

Instrument

All items measuring the five MUSIC components were rated on a 6-point Likert scale with the following descriptors: 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Somewhat disagree*, 4 = *Somewhat agree*, 5 = *Agree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*. The ratings for the items were averaged to create a total score for each scale. The questionnaire also included items related to demographic information (e.g., age; gender).

Learners' perceptions of the five MUSIC model components (i.e., empowerment, usefulness, success, interest, and caring) were measured using the MUSIC Inventory (Jones, 2016). This instrument identifies the extent to which a student perceives that he or she has control of his or her learning environment (empowerment scale; 5 items), the usefulness of course activities for his or her future (usefulness scale; 5 items), that he or she can be successful in the coursework (success scale; 4 items), his or her interest in course methods and activities (interest scale; 6 items), and that the instructor cares about his or her learning and wellbeing (caring scale; 6 items). Example items include: "I had control over how I learned the course content" (empowerment), "In general, the coursework was useful to me" (usefulness), "I was confident that I could succeed in the

coursework" (success), "The coursework was interesting to me" (interest), and "The instructor cared about how well I did in this course" (caring). Cronbach's alpha values were all acceptable and ranged from 0.84 to 0.92 ($\alpha = 0.84$ for empowerment, 0.88 for usefulness, 0.84 for success, 0.88 for interest, and 0.92 for caring).

FINDINGS

Learners' Perceptions of the Five MUSIC Components

The descriptive statistics associated with the perception of the five components of the MUSIC model are displayed in Table 1. The averages of three of the five components (i.e., usefulness, success, and caring) were above 5 on the 6-point Likert scale; the remaining two (empowerment and interest) were above 4.5. These results suggest that the learners had a high level of motivation to learn. To test the first hypothesis that the perceived levels of the components would differ, the assumption of normality was evaluated and satisfied, as the skew and kurtosis for the distribution of the five components were less than $|2.0|$ and $|9.0|$, respectively (Posten, 1984; see Table 1). However, Levene's test for homogeneity indicated unequal variances, $F(4, 1195) = 14.69$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine that a statistically significant difference ($H = 1.62.70$, $p < .001$) existed between the five components.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Five Components of the MUSIC Model

Emotion	Descriptive statistics			
	M	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
Empowerment	4.79	0.81	-0.63	0.29
Usefulness	5.19	0.76	-1.11	0.89
Success	5.14	0.78	-0.83	0.03
Interest	4.65	0.98	-0.80	0.40
Caring	5.52	0.59	-1.79	3.55

Note: All items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, n = 240

Differences between the Five MUSIC Components

To further evaluate the nature of the differences between the five means, matched t-tests were conducted between each pair of components to identify which ones significantly differed (Table 2). *Caring* was significantly higher than the other four components ($p < .001$). *Usefulness* and *Success* were significantly higher than two components (Empowerment and Interest, $p < .001$). *Empowerment* and *Interest* were significantly lower than three of the components (Usefulness, Success, and Caring, $p < .001$). The results revealed that student perceptions of *Usefulness, Success*, and *Caring* were significantly higher than *Empowerment* and *Interest*.

Table 2
Bivariate Comparisons of the Five MUSIC Model Components

Empowerment	1	2	3	4
Usefulness	10.98***			
Success	8.15***	-1.06		
Interest	3.32***	-6.25***	-8.36***	
Caring	14.95***	8.43***	7.54***	15.27***

*** $p < .001$, n = 240

Gender Differences

Independent t-test comparisons revealed that males and females differed in their perceptions regarding two of the five MUSIC model components (Table 3). Males (M = 5.28, SD = 0.65) reported significantly higher *Success* than females (M = 4.98, SD = 0.89, t = 3.01, p < .01). Additionally, the *Interest* component was higher for males (M = 4.80, SD = 0.88) than for females (M = 4.49, SD = 1.08, t = 2.44, p < .05). Both differences show a small effect size (Cohen, 1992).

Table 3

Gender Differences in the Perception of MUSIC Model Components

Emotion	Descriptive		Statistics				
	Femalesa		Malesb		Independent t-test		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	Df	D
Empower	4.69	0.94	4.87	0.68	1.78	238	0.23
Usefulness	5.11	0.86	5.26	0.67	1.54	238	0.19
Success	4.98	0.89	5.28	0.65	3.01**	238	0.39
Interest	4.49	1.08	4.80	0.88	2.44*	238	0.32
Caring	5.50	0.67	5.52	0.52	0.26	238	0.03

Note: All items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale
* p <= .05; ** p <= .01, an = 109; bn = 131

High vs Low Achievers

Independent t-test comparisons showed that high and low achievers differed in their perceptions of two of the five MUSIC model components at the p < .01 level (Table 4). High achievers (M = 4.96, SD = 0.75) reported significantly higher *Empowerment* than low achievers (M = 4.65, SD = 0.83, t = 3.03, p < .01). Additionally, the *Success* component was higher for high achievers (M = 5.36, SD = 0.66) than for low achievers (M = 4.97, SD = 0.83, t = 3.94, p < .001). These differences show a small and medium effect size, respectively (Cohen, 1992).

Table 4

Differences in the Perception of MUSIC Model Components between High and Low Achievers

Emotion	Descriptive		Statistics				
	High Acha		Low Achb		Independent t-test		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	Df	D
Empower	4.96	0.75	4.65	0.83	3.03**	238	0.40
Usefulness	5.32	0.70	5.09	0.80	2.32*	238	0.30
Success	5.36	0.66	4.97	0.83	3.94***	238	0.52
Interest	4.83	0.96	4.53	0.99	2.33*	238	0.30
Caring	5.59	0.54	5.45	0.62	1.71	238	0.23

Note: All items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale
* p <= .05; ** p <= .01; *** p <= .001; an = 105; bn = 135

DISCUSSION

In Mexico, although competence in English is linked to important life experiences such as education and employment, few Mexicans (5 to 12%) learn the language well. Because motivation is linked to language learning and performance, this study aimed to identify whether EFL learners perceive different levels of five class components designed to raise motivation. This study's contribution to the research on motivation to learn is that Mexican EFL learners generally report relatively high levels of important

motivational components, and females and low achievers are at a disadvantage, motivationally speaking.

Regarding the first research question, learners reported a high level of caring from teachers, perceived activities as useful, and stated that they could successfully learn from them. However, they reported lower empowerment and interest in class activities compared with usefulness, success, and caring. These results coincide with Borjian's (2015) finding that EFL learners in Mexico lack interest in teacher-centered methods and a traditional focus on grammar. Further, these negative findings may be explained by research that suggests that teachers who use autonomy-supportive teaching methods enhance student empowerment, learning, and performance (Jang et al., 2016)—a scenario that has not yet emerged in Mexican EFL classes (Borjian, 2015).

Gender differences were the focus of the second research question, and as hypothesized based on OECD (2015) findings regarding math and science achievement, the motivational landscape favors males. Females' lower belief in their ability to be successful and lower interest in learning tasks may explain, in part, why 39% of Mexican females aged 18 to 24 do not continue their studies or pursue employment. This finding, however, contrasts with Jones et al.'s (2015) result that females reported higher usefulness, success, and interest during a course on personal health at a U.S. university.

These contrasting results reported by females in Mexico and the U.S. may be rooted in distinct cultural differences; i.e., gender equality in education and the labor market is less of a reality in Mexico than in developed nations. For example, Camarena Adame et al. (2014) have pointed out that, in Mexico, females spend less time in school, on average, than males (8.5 and 8.9 years of schooling, respectively) and have a lower literacy rate (90% and 94%, respectively). In the workforce, the segment of women who work has risen from a mere 17% in 1971 to 41% in 2013. This contrasts with 75% in the U.S. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In their writing, Camarena Adame et al. (2014) have explained that Mexican females are normally expected to raise the children and manage the household, rather than take on economic responsibilities. Hence, on average, females' drive to achieve academic success is lower than that of males because schooling beyond secondary education is associated with entering the job market, which is not something girls are expected to do. Camarena Adame et al. (2014) encourage Mexicans to reflect on how families and schools transmit the ways the different genders are supposed to behave and relate to others. In other words, one key to encouraging females to seek educational success in Mexico is by adjusting the message that parents communicate to their daughters.

In developed countries such as the U.S., young adult females are more likely to be engaged in studies or work. Specifically, 84% of American women aged 15 to 19 study or work, whereas in Mexico the percent is significantly less (61%) (OCDE, 2015). Clark (2015) examined why some American students persist in their studies and others do not, finding that students need both the internal drive and "their family's support, expectations, and encouragement" (p. 185). In other words, the family's attitude toward education is fundamental to success. In contrast, the Mexican tradition that women

maintain the home is not likely to engender a need to be interested and successful in the classroom.

Because females reported experiencing less *Interest* and *Success* than males, and part of that experience may be rooted in traditional influences, the question arises: *How could we overcome traditional and family influences in the classroom?* Jones (2009) proposes that, in the classroom, teachers should use specific strategies (e.g., set reasonable course expectations, provide a variety of assignments, and give honest feedback) to increase females' *Interest* and *Success* in courses. These strategies are further discussed in the practical implications section.

On a worldwide scale, UNICEF (2017) has identified 18 barriers to girls' education and proposes that countries adopt interventions to overcome each barrier. Just two examples of barriers will suffice to emphasize that much work has yet to be done in Mexico and other developing nations. First, outdated curricula normally reinforce gender stereotypes; therefore, girls are less likely to achieve parity in learning outcomes. UNICEF proposes that teachers be trained to use materials that are free of gender bias. Second, there is a lack of knowledge in society regarding the benefits of education, which perpetuates barriers to girls' education. To counter these traditional tendencies, UNICEF proposes that schools adopt parent education programs and promote parent-teacher associations, among numerous other strategies.

The third research question regarded the perceptions of high versus low achievers. This study revealed, as predicted based on Tan's (2017) and Li, et al.'s (2016) findings, that EFL classes favor high achievers in their sense of empowerment and success with learning tasks. Unfortunately, not only did 56.2% (135 out of 240) of the students perform poorly in English, but those same students also perceived lower levels of these components. Evidently, regarding motivation in Mexico, as in China, EFL classes generally consist of two subgroups: one that is high in achievement and motivation to learn, and one that is not.

The subsequent practical implications section presents, based on the MUSIC model, strategies designed to help motivate students. However, because having high and low achievers in the same English class is quite common, it is worthwhile to comment here on the handling of mixed-ability groups. It is essential to recognize that success with such a group depends primarily on the teacher's attitude and behavior. *Is she genuinely concerned about the learning and well-being of each student? Has she done her homework by investigating what strategies may work with such a group? Is she willing to experiment with those strategies, knowing that the first time they are implemented, they may flop? Does she realize that small victories with low achievers are as valuable as are those obvious victories with high achievers? Does she know that low achievers find time in school less enjoyable, and does she act accordingly?* Certainly, it is easier to throw grammar and vocabulary at students; the high achievers will learn. However, that is far from purposeful teaching. A teacher who is sincerely concerned with helping *all* students learn will need to effectively instruct a mixed-ability group.

Strategies for Mixed-Ability Groups

First, if possible, the teacher should guide a discussion about students having different abilities. Students may feel relieved if they know they will be treated as individuals

rather than compared to others. In addition, it is helpful for students to know that sometimes their teacher will ask different students to perform different tasks so that each student feels appropriately challenged. Second, the teacher should use variety in learning tasks: alter groups, respond to learning styles, nominate students to answer questions to avoid strong student domination, correct anonymously to avoid embarrassment, and always praise students when they do something right. Third, teachers need to cultivate a caring environment in the classroom. To do so, teachers ought to model kindness and respect, help students—especially low achievers—see that perseverance is more important than their mistakes, and teach listening skills and the value of empathy. Caring classrooms promote more positive emotions in students, such as enjoyment and hope, and lessen negative ones, such as anxiety and hopelessness, which may especially hinder a low achiever's progress.

Practical Implications

These conclusions suggest that the most important ways EFL teachers can foster their students' motivation to learn are by adopting strategies that increase students' sense of success, empowerment, and interest. The perception of these three components were found to be lower than the other two components in both this study and Li et al.'s. The fact that students in this study perceived their teachers as caring is a positive starting point, and one that teachers need to leverage to encourage language learners, especially the two vulnerable cohorts (females and low achievers), to benefit from other motivation-enhancing strategies in the language classroom.

Jones (2009) has listed a variety of teaching strategies that can be used to enhance the perception of the five MUSIC components. The following are ideas about how to enhance empowerment, success, and interest—the three components that subjects in this study need to improve to become more motivated, and therefore more successful.

Empowerment

To increase students' perceptions of empowerment, Jones (2009) suggests that teachers become more autonomy supportive. To this end, they could provide students with choices about goals, materials, strategies, and which classmates they choose to work with. Students could also be included in the creation of classroom policies. For example, at the beginning of a course, teachers could elicit from the students the importance of only using English in class, as well as avoiding side conversations in their native language. Further, teachers could encourage students to express their opinions and feelings face to face or through anonymous surveys. Reilly (1997; 2001) has discussed how to respond to students with empathy by avoiding communication roadblocks such as judging or diverting the conversation.

Success

To increase students' belief that they can be successful in the course, the instructor ought to make the course expectations explicit, give clear examples for students to follow, and include rubrics that explain grading criteria. In addition, students need to view the activities as appropriately challenging; that is, not too difficult. Further, students need feedback that is specific and timely so they can adjust and recognize that they are on a path to success. Finally, and most importantly, teachers must help students

see the connection between effort and success by demonstrating learning strategies and giving learners multiple opportunities to achieve the learning goals. For example, language students whose L1 is Spanish often struggle with question formation because auxiliaries such as *do, does,* and *did* do not have a Spanish counterpart. To help students overcome the challenge that auxiliaries present, teachers need to offer both deductive and inductive presentations of their use. For example, adult learners who are normally considered more analytical can benefit from a deductive grammar presentation. However, learners who are less analytical, such as young learners, are more likely to benefit initially from examples of the language in use, i.e. inductive learning. In both cases, teachers must follow the initial presentation with plenty of controlled and freer practice to maximize learning.

Interest

Teachers need to know their students and base tasks on their likes and prior knowledge. Therefore, it is valuable to give interest surveys at the beginning of the course to learn about students' previous experiences, hobbies, and favorite celebrities. To catch and hold interest, Bolkan and Griffin (2018) propose that teachers use a variety of activities and even maintain a level of unpredictability (Dewaele, 2015). Teachers ought to vary the presentation of new grammar structures and vocabulary, continually change the language skills being practiced, and alter groupings (i.e., individual, pairs, trios, or groups). Engendering positive emotions such as enjoyment, pride, and hope (Sánchez-Rosas & Esquivel, 2016) is also linked to higher motivation and performance. Including facts or stories that students will find surprising, such as the behavior of exotic animals or how foreign cultures celebrate unique customs, may also pique curiosity and interest.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was based solely on a self-report questionnaire, a data source that ought to be expanded in the future with observational data and qualitative techniques such as interviews or journaling. Méndez-López (2011) has used these techniques with teachers and students in Mexico to explore language learners' emotions to understand the motivational experience of the latter. It would be valuable to ask students at what moments during the course they felt empowered or successful, and what activities they found interesting. Responses to these questions could guide experimental researchers to design studies to test the benefits of motivational strategies rooted in student and teacher comments.

Another limitation is that this study included only university students. Future research ought to explore the perceptions of EFL learners in secondary schools, because a significant percentage of females—39%, according to the OCDE (2018)—abandon their studies before university. If secondary school teachers could understand their females' motivation to learn, it might prompt them to incorporate strategies such as those discussed above, and therefore increase the girls' motivation and help them become more successful students.

Finally, research should evolve toward experimental designs that identify measurable teaching strategies directed at enhancing learners' perceptions of the five motivational components and thereby increase EFL learning and performance. An example of this is

to give students a pre-test of grammar points and vocabulary at the beginning of a course. Students should grade their own exams and identify several items they answered wrong. Then, the teacher could ask students to investigate the items (e.g., online, with more advanced students, or from the grammar presentations in their course book) and prepare a PowerPoint presentation of the items and how to answer the questions correctly. Similar items would be included on the exam at the end of the period to determine whether this activity resulted in improved performance. To evaluate the impact of this activity on motivation to learn, the MUSIC Inventory could be applied as a post-test; in addition, students and teachers could be interviewed about the activity's effectiveness. Hopefully, experiments of this sort will eventually lead teachers to use more motivation-enhancing strategies that increase student performance and permanence in school. The upshot is that better-educated adults who show competence in English are likely to have better job opportunities and greater success at work, and therefore a higher quality of life.

CONCLUSION

The present investigation sought to identify the learners' perception of five factors associated with motivation to learn. Although studies around the world have explored the perception of these factors, this is the first such study carried out in Mexico. It was concluded, first, that Mexican EFL students experience different levels of the five factors associated with motivation, a finding that can guide teachers to make improvements in the teaching and learning process. Specifically, teachers ought to adopt strategies described in this article to increase the learners' perception of empowerment, success, and interest. Second, because females and low achievers are at a disadvantage, motivationally speaking, it is essential that English teaching professionals respond to the needs of females and low achievers so that these types of learners might perceive higher levels of these components and, therefore, higher motivation to learn.

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