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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFL CLASS

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A:

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ABSTRACT

This was the first step of an action research study to explore the nature of the issues that influence students' perceptions of the learning process in the EFL classroom. It aimed at exploring the nature of the positive and/or negative factors that motivate or de-motivate students, as well as identify how they overcome or solve the negative situations they may encounter. It was carried out in four centers belonging to a high school that provides technological education in the state of Veracruz and in which English classes are taken as a foreign language. The implemented methodology consisted in a mixed method approach in which open-ended questionnaires were administered to 30 students to obtain a general idea about their perceptions, issues and insights. The information was analyzed by means of aspects of Grounded Theory, and from the gathered data, a guide for a semi-structured interview grid was designed and 2 in-depth interviews were carried out. The research showed that students' perceptions concentrated on three main elements. The first one was teacher's practice in which they explained their preference for a sensible, approachable and flexible teacher. The second aspect was the materials used in the classroom, in which students expressed their need for varied and appealing materials. The third point was directed at the students' own attitudes and feelings as a significant element in their learning process. In sum, this inquiry was focused on exploring students' thoughts and perceptions to comprehend the nature of the issues that affect students in the EFL classroom. It provided relevant information which could be of use for teachers in order to improve the teaching-learning experience, and for authorities to reconsider their policies and actions.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers are continually updating their skills and knowledge, either in courses and seminars that the school, authorities or other organizations offer, or because they are interested and do it in an autonomous, self-directed way. However, little can be accomplished if the new knowledge or skills are not put into practice:

> In a word, implementation is a variable, and if the change is a potentially good one, success (such as improved students learning or increased skills on the part of teachers) will depend on the degree and quality of change in actual practice.
>
> (Fullan, 2007 p.85)

Changes within a school are very complicated goals to achieve because of the many and complex dynamics that occur inside the classroom. Complexity Theory, which emerged from the fields of mathematics, considers that there is no use in researching an isolated element. It is important to consider the context and all of the interactions and relationships that happen within it. Given the fact that the classroom is a place in which many aspects and exchanges take part at the same time and may influence and be influenced by each other, it can be said that the classroom is a complex system

> …in which its parts interact, a complex system cannot be so understood, its operation cannot be predicted, at least over long periods of time, because the actions of its agents are interlinked and interdependent, eliminating simple casual explanations of behavior.
>
> (Nelson, 2011p. 93)

Taking this into account, in order to improve teachers' practice it is important to consider not just the teacher's knowledge, ideas and experience, but also those of the students. They are active agents in the teaching and learning process and live it and experience it

every day. Therefore, the relationship between teachers and students is intertwined and the insights of both participants are likely to be helpful to understand and improve said process.

The fact that students are active participants in this process can provide valuable information. Students' beliefs, feelings and actions affect and are affected by situations that happen in the classroom. According to Schunk (1992p.3) students are

> …individuals who formulate achievement goals, selectively attend to events, engage in activities, and employ strategies they believe will help them attain goals, process (organize, transform, code) information in meaningful ways for storage in memory, and create and maintain a positive psychological climate for accomplishing goals.

In sum, students are relevant agents in the teaching-learning process, capable of organizing their actions and creating an appropriate environment to achieve their goals. This can lead to a better classroom environment and an improved teaching-learning experience for all the people involved. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to know what students think. Considering the aspects previously explained, the focus of this research was to understand the nature of the topics that impact students' perceptions of their English class. Students' feedback could be of use for teachers who want to improve their practice and for authorities to reflect on their school policies and how they can be modified or adapted in order to fit not just the school's needs and characteristics, but also those of the teachers and students.

1. CONTEXT AND FOCUS

In every inquiry, in order to achieve the goals and to obtain findings that can be helpful for those involved in the process it is important to consider the context. The specific characteristics of the situation in which the research will be immersed in, can directly affect the outcomes of the inquiry. Sherman and Webb (2001) consider that in qualitative research the individuals, thoughts and situations are more likely to be easily understood if they are not isolated from their context.

As it previously mentioned, this research was developed in a technological preparatory school in the state of Veracruz. As part of the National Development Plan (PND for its initials in Spanish), a *Reforma Integral del Bachillerato* was implemented under the Public Education Secretariat's (SEP for its initials in Spanish) guidelines. Since the Common Curricular Framework establishes the need to develop meaningful learning, part of the improvement is directed at working in a learning-oriented way. The principal aim is to develop competencies that allow the students to strengthen their attitudes, knowledge and abilities in order to acquire long-life learning that they can apply in their day to day lives. The modifications included in this reform, were made with the intention that all the competencies that students develop throughout their education, can be related to their daily needs in life. Therefore, the units of the programme aim to have a close relationship with the lives and interests of the students to allow them to relate their immediate context with the content they covered at school. They consider that this will allow students to enter different work environments more easily and have more professional qualifications.

Taking English lessons during preparatory education is part of the Common Curricular Framework mentioned above. Although the programme of the school is distributed in six semesters, English classes are taken from the first to the fifth semester. The English programme specifies that the four basic skills of language (listening, speaking, reading and

writing) need to be developed so that they can put them into practice inside and outside the classroom. This is so they can use these skills not just for educational purposes, but also to apply them in their future work fields. It is stated that teachers must change their roles from "information givers" to mediators and guides. It is hoped that students develop an interest for the English language and teachers are reminded that the amount of enthusiasm that they show for their subject will aid in the achievement of the objectives.

The English programme after the reform has for each level (English I-English V) a set of units which are called 'Fundamental concepts' that teachers need to develop. Each 'Fundamental Concept' specifies 'subsidiary concepts', 'language functions', 'grammatical notions', 'vocabulary', 'main categories´, 'values' and 'learning context' all of which each unit covers and that all teachers need to teach. No textbook is mentioned in the programme, just a manual that gives the teachers a sample on how to fill the lesson plan, and how to give the class.

Reforms in education are nothing new. They have been present at all levels, for all the subjects and for a very long time ago. Reforms in school programme represent not just a change of terminology, of school structure, but also of teaching approaches. Several times reforms are directed at internal aspects very difficult to change; they can be the result of superficial political actions or an attempt to incorporate a culture (the one of the reformers) which is different from that of the school (De Puelles, 2012). This reform may clash with the rules and guidelines that orientate the work of all the people involved in the school, resulting in a new set of policies that many times is rejected.

The relationship between policy and the actual practice may not be as closed as it was expected. Lipski (1980 as cited in Sutton, 1999) developed the concept of 'street level

bureaucracy' which made reference to the people who put into practice policies in which the policy aftermaths are molded and its applicability influenced, which can cause the results to be different from those anticipated. Context plays a very important role when implementing policies because

> Policies then are textual interventions but they also carry with them material constraints and possibilities. The responses to these texts have 'real' consequences…experienced within…the context of practice…The key point is that policy is not simply received and implemented within this arena rather it is subject to interpretation and then 'recreated'.
>
> (Bower et. al 1992p. 22)

One of the main aspects of the English programme is to develop activities that foster interest in students to learn and practice the language. However, achieving this objective may be more complicated than it seems. The context of each school, of each class, and even of each student may influence certain events within the classroom, and this may affect in a positive or negative way the course of the learning experience. According to Borphy (1983), student motivation is a key element which subsidizes to learning as perhaps

> …students who are motivated to learn will not necessarily find classroom tasks intensely pleasurable or exciting, but they will take them seriously, find them meaningful and worthwhile, and try to get the intended benefit from them.
>
> (Borphy, 1983p.4)

If we take into account that motivation plays a significant role in the learning process, if the 'intended benefit' wants to be attained, it is important to know what motivates the students. Which are the factors that make them feel de-motivated. Which are the

problems they encounter and how do they face them. Giving voice to students can be very useful, but sometimes very frightening; it is not very often that students are given this opportunity and it is uncertain how they will use it. Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) consider that asking students about their perceptions helps them increase their confidence in talking about issues that matter and therefore, it can have a decisive influence on their engagement with learning.

Usually young students want to be treated "like adults", they want their opinions to be taken into account and their voices heard. Nevertheless, society in general tends to disregard them in the situations in which they could decide or express their opinions based on an deep-rooted idea of childhood (Rudduck & Flutter, 2007). In other words, young people are not accepted as individuals who can express their opinions, make suggestions, take decisions and ponder about important matters, especially the ones that can affect them or impact them directly.

Based on all the aspects mentioned above and bearing in mind the fact that students are actually capable of expressing their opinions on important matters such as their own education; this study was developed. In order to improve teaching practice, the opinions of all the agents involved in the process have to be taken into account seriously. Therefore, the main objective of this research was to understand what these preparatory school EFL students have experienced in their English classes, which were the positive and negative factors that impacted them, and what they did to overcome the problems they encountered. For the present inquiry there was one main research question and three sub-questions stated as follows:

- What is the nature of the issues that influence students' perceptions of their learning process in the EFL classroom?

    - What is the nature of the positive or motivating factors that influence students?

    - What is the nature of the negative or de-motivating factors that affect students?

    - What are students' perceptions as to how to overcome the negative factors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this research was to understand the nature of the issues that influence students' perceptions. In the previous chapter the research question and sub-questions were specified taking into account the nature of the issues that influence the students in their particular learning context; positive and negative factors that may motivate or de-motivate them, and students' perceptions as to how to overcome the negative situations they may encounter. In this section a theoretical framework will be formed in order to show what authors and researchers have mentioned and investigated about these topics. Trying to understand students' perceptions of the EFL class is not an easy task, in every classroom many and varied situations can convey that affect the students in one way or the other, and the issues that affect them can be different for every student. Taking this into account, different aspects that may impact the students have been considered in order to try to find the answer to the main research question.

2.1 Students' perceptions of the context and learning environment

Although it may seem that sometimes students are relaxed and show a lack of interest in many aspects of their lives, including school, they are in a constant state of pressure from the authorities, teachers, peers and their immediate context in general. According to

Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, and Connell (in Akey, 2006) those students who consider that they do not have the ability to have successful outcomes in school will show little or no effort to perform well in the classroom and school- related activities. Feeling that they are at a disadvantage or that they will not succeed in class, can lead them to act with this apparent indifference and many times this is taken in the wrong way by teachers and parents. However, there are several factors that can cause this feeling of weakness and some may have their roots in the context. According to Rost (2006) in general EFL students do not obtain enough teaching, they do not receive enough attention during classes to solve their doubts and problems, and they get very little feedback and real opportunities to interact with the language.

It cannot be denied that the previous considerations may be true in our country. Public schools (as the one in this research) have been offering English as a Foreign Language classes in secondary and preparatory levels and even so, students still feel insecure and prone to failure when learning this language. Martinez (n.d.) carried out a study in El Salvador to know why public school students do not learn English and a part of the conclusions are related to the context that surrounds public schools. It was found that public schools do not have the necessary resources to create an appropriate learning context; they lack materials, technology and support from teachers and principals; not to mention the little opportunities to interact with the language. Most teachers in public school give their classes in Spanish, focus their teaching on grammar and translation and the type of evaluation is inconsistent with the communicative approach they are supposed to teach.

Nonetheless not all is lost. According to Wallace (2011), even though students may have limited contact with the real language or few possibilities to interact with an English speaking community, the use of a situational approach, activities such as role play and

other simulated scenarios may be very useful tools. Besides these, when the context provides them with meaningful and interesting environments, when they participate in engaging activities and challenging tasks, they are more engaged and motivated to learn (Akey, 2006). If students perceive that their previous knowledge is taken into account; that their culture and immediate context is related to the activities they have to perform, if their likes and interests are considered, students will participate more actively and be interested to learn (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

2.2 Students' perceptions on teaching techniques and activities

Students live and experience the teaching-learning process every day, and as active participants they have enough information about the different activities and strategies that teachers use. McBride (2009) carried out a research on students' perceptions on the teaching approaches used in EFL teaching in which the pupils were asked to answer a questionnaire that highlighted 5 categories (grammar study, small group work, acting pre-made conversations, memorizing and repeating and writing and present small acts). The main findings showed that students think that grammar practice is beneficial for their learning, but they consider that those grammar exercises should then be put into practice through writing or communicative activities. In contrast, memorizing did not get high results, students considered memorizing as a loss of time and as an activity not really related to learning, just a repetition of concepts that they may not even understand.

Moghani and Mohamed (2003) were able to identify that students like games and role play during their lessons. The majority of students expressed that cooperative learning is a very helpful tool to learn, and that humor is very important in order to create a relaxed and comfortable environment. In another study, Mansoor, Yossatorn and Yossiri (2012) detected that the majority of students liked the activities suggested by the teacher such as presentations, acting, giving speeches, etc. because they felt that these activities help

them handle many situations they could encounter in life, but some others disliked the fact that these presentations and activities had to be in English because they felt insecure and nervous about their performance. Another finding was that students were not in favor of individual activities, they preferred pair or small group work in order to work in a more comfortable way. Working with another person made them feel more secure.

2.3 Students' perceptions of the teacher

It is not uncommon that many students do not want to participate during the class because they are afraid of the judgments that either the teacher or the other students can make of their performance. Xiao (in Pearson-Evans & Leahy, 2007) conducted a research in China were the perceptions of teachers and students were compared and contrasted. They discovered that students preferred to work with their peers in small groups rather than talk to the whole class. They showed adverse attitudes concerning asking or answering direct questions in class; apparently they felt more protected when they were surrounded by their classmates and felt a more relaxed environment. One of the characteristics of adolescents, which is consistent with this aspect, is the fact that they are always in small groups, they like to work and study together and prefer to do school work such as presentations or projects with peers they feel comfortable with because of the strong relationship they develop during their school years.

School has been called the 'second home' of students owing to the fact that they spend much of their time at school, and because of the type of relationships and dynamics that happen within it. As in any family, one of the most relevant aspects for it to function in a proper way is communication. When students feel that the teacher communicates with them, showing them that they are open to their ideas and points of view and allowing

them to participate and get involved in the process, students respond in a positive way. Shishavan (2009) found that students give a lot of importance to characteristics related to teachers' personality and how they conduct themselves around the students. The pupils want a teacher that is caring, and who shows genuine concern for them because these characteristics motivate them to learn. In contrast however, it was found that sharing a lot of personal experiences with the students was not seen as a good trait, and that teaching in Spanish could signify a weakness in the teacher's knowledge of the language.

Khalil Gibran a Lebanese-American artist, poet, and writer once said that the teacher "who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind." Undoubtedly, the role of the teacher is vital in the teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, however, the general perception of teachers in Mexico has lost importance in recent years. The constant labor conflicts, the lack of some teachers' responsibility, the teaching problems, etc. has made it difficult to maintain the same level of respect from society for teachers (Pérez, 2011). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the role of the teachers is less important or relevant for students' learning and goal achievement.

2.4 Students' perceptions of the social relationships

Humans are social beings by nature. We teach, live and learn from, and with, others. Humans are always seeking contact with each other and students are obviously not the exception. Teachers should be aware that

> Classrooms are social settings; teaching and learning occur through social interaction between teachers and students. As teaching and learning take place, they are complicated processes and are affected by peer-group relationships. The interactions and relationships between teachers and students, and among students, as they work side by side, constitute the group processes of the classroom.
>
> (Hoque, n.d.p.1)

Nugent (2009) discovered that good relationships between teachers and students can act as facilitators for learning and student success, and that it is possible to meet the students' needs beyond educational teaching aspects. According to CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) productive student-teacher interactions can originate positive outcomes, among them: positive and helpful relationships between teachers and students, more and better learning results in the students, and improvement of social skills. Any person who has acted as a student at any certain time (disregarding the level or subject) cannot deny the importance of the relationship with the teacher. Teachers at any level are role models that students are likely to follow to some degree; teachers may be guides, counselors and sometimes even a shoulder to cry on. High school level is especially difficult for students for all the psychological, emotional and physical changes they are going through, this is a time when they are susceptible to harm and difficulties, and positive relationships with teachers may help students to cope with these more easily.

The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (1997) conducted research on harmful situations for adolescents, and suggestions to avoid them. It was detected that school connectedness was associated with moderate levels of 'emotional distress', 'suicidal involvement', 'violence' and 'substance use'. It was concluded that

> …school engagement is a critical protective factor against a variety of risk behaviors, influenced in good measure by perceived caring from teachers and high expectations for student performance
>
> (831)

Apart from healthy relationships with teachers (if they exist), students typically rely on their peers to resolve day to day situations and problems that may arise in the classroom. Wentzel (1998) carried out a study where she could identify that peer relationships

motivate students, and encourage them to show " prosocial forms of behavior (which) remind us of the critical, positive role that adolescents can play in their classmates' social adjustment to school"(207).

In this chapter, I discussed what authors and researchers have affirmed and investigated in this field. In particular, regarding the nature of the issues that impact EFL students of this technological preparatory school system, literature on the topic seems to focus on students' perceptions of the teacher, the techniques and approaches implemented in the classroom, the learning environment, as well as the social relationships that occur between the teacher and student, and among their peers. In the next chapter, the appropriate method and techniques to discover if students' perceptions of that particular context are related to what the literature asserts, and if so to what extent, is discussed.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research design, instruments, data collection process and analysis method are explained. The "Research Design" segment explains the kind of research that was carried out in this inquiry, detailing relevant information about qualitative research, action research and why they were used. In the "Context" section, the particular place and situation in which the investigation was carried out is described. The "Participants" segment clarifies information about the participants and how they came to be informants in the research. In the "Data Collection Method" part, the instruments that were used during this inquiry are described, as well as why, and how they were used. Then the most relevant elements of Grounded Theory will be explained as it was used for the "Data Analysis". Finally, in the "Research procedure", the process in which this inquiry was carried out will be detailed.

3.1 Research Design

Learning another language is not an easy task, because it involves many aspects not just of the language itself, but of all the participants involved. In a language classroom many different interactions and relationships occur, therefore, in order to obtain a better understanding of the relationships, dynamics and situations that may affect the participants (in this case the students) one way or the other, it is important to retrieve the information from the people directly involved. Also it may be important not just to take into account the context, the working environment or the opinions of experts outside the schools, but the teachers and students who are the main actors in the teaching-learning process. In particular, although it can be relevant to share and take ideas from authors, authorities or colleagues, it is also significant to consider the students' opinions, given the fact that they are living the teaching-learning experience first-hand. In other words:

> …those bent on improvement in schools might usefully start by inviting
> pupils to talk about what makes learning difficult for them, about what
> diminishes their motivation and engagement, and what makes some
> give up and others settle for a "minimum risk,   minimum effort"
> position–even though they know that doing well matters.
>
>   (Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace in Delaney, 2009p.1)

The above quotation sums up the main objective of this inquiry - to explore the nature of the issues that influence students' perceptions of the learning process in the EFL classroom, and to get an idea of the factors that they consider may enhance or harm their learning. Consequently, for this research, the methodology was selected taking into

account the topic that was going to be investigated, the research objectives and questions, the context and social aspects of the study, as well as the time available to carry out the inquiry.

Defining the methodology is very important for the development of any research. It is not just a question of considering and deciding which research methods to use:

> …but also [we need to] consider the logic behind the methods we use in the context of our research study and explain why we are using a particular method or technique and why we are not using others so that research results are capable of being evaluated either by the researcher himself or by others.
>
> (Kothrari, 2004p.8)

Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of students' insights of the issues that influence their perceptions of the learning process in the EFL classroom, a qualitative approach was employed. Qualitative research is defined as:

> An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.
>
> (Van Maanen, 1979 in Merriam, 2009p.13)

For this study, it was considered that qualitative research, in particular, Action Research was the best option because it allows for the research of various aspects or issues that may arise in the classroom, reflection on the nature of these, and the planning of plausible solutions or answers that may be put into action. However, it is important to always bear in mind that the research process can take the researcher along many paths depending on

the data that is gathered that may, in turn, necessitate the adoption of other measures (Wallace, 1998). In sum, Action Research is a

> …reflective process whereby in a given problem area, where one wishes to improve practice or personal understanding, inquiry is carried out by the practitioner -first, to clearly define the problem; secondly, to specify a plan of action- including the testing of hypotheses by application of action to the problem.
>
> (Mckernan, 1996p.5)

In order to carry out an action research inquiry, it is necessary to follow some basic steps which will allow the researcher to systematically document the complete process and have enough evidence to decide where to go and which actions to take. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (in Hopkins 2008p.51) the action research cycle consists of four main stages which are:

a) Plan: during this stage the comprehension of the issue is fostered and a plan is developed for intercession

b) Act: the intercession process is conducted

c) Observe: during the intervention process, data is collected in several ways.

d) Reflect: the gathered data is analyzed and then new intercessional plans to repeat the process until the researcher has gathered enough data to get a deeper understanding of the problem or the problem is solved.

This particular inquiry, owing to time constraints, is the first stage in this process given that in order to really create a change and an improvement in schools, the examination of teachers´ experiences and students' perceptions are just the first step. Although the context, the environment and experts' opinions are relevant for school improvement, it is

indispensable to carry out actions based on the needs and desires of the principal actors involved.

In order to change and improve our surroundings, aspects of the classroom, the school, and/or the system, it is necessary to know how the people involved in the process feel, their perceptions about the issue that is investigated, the situations that are affecting them, and how they are resolving these. In a complex environment as any school is, some issues may be clearer or more evident than others, but they are always relevant, and fair, all of the participants. For this inquiry, and bearing in mind that as an action research, the ultimate aim is to improve the teacher's practice, the views of students is also important to really know the situations that may be happening in the classroom, their nature and how to improve them. To this end, some aspects of Grounded Theory were used since it investigates situations that occur in real life, in real contexts and analyses the data without predetermined suppositions or hypothesis, rather, the theory emerges from the data. This theory is frequently used to convey theories based on actual phenomena, and to understand the participants' points of view of the problem and discern how they try to work them out (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory is

> …a qualitative strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study.
>
> (Creswell, 2009 p. 13)

It uses a systematic assortment of procedures to inductively derive theory from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This procedure is about carefully analyzing the data, recognizing its most relevant aspects or concepts, going back to the participants to further inquire

about vital pieces that may be missing, and letting it guide the path of the research; in sum, in the Grounded Theory process:

> Data collection leads to analysis. Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions. Questions lead to more data collection so that the researcher might learn more about those concepts. This circular process continues until the research reaches the point of saturation.
>
> (Corbin & Strauss, 2008 p.145)

3.2 Research Context

The inquiry took place in a technological preparatory school that has centers all along the state of Veracruz. All of the centers are located in rural and semi-rural areas, and offer technological studies that allow students to be able to enter to work settings as soon as they finish studying. All of the centers in which the research was carried out are schools with the basic services like electricity and water, although in some of the centers they do not function properly sometimes. They have equipment related to each of the technological BA's that they offer and relatively extensive green areas.

The English lessons are given along five semesters, and their goal is to develop communicative competencies that allow students to use the language inside and outside the classroom. In the English programme it is detailed that students should be competent in the four skills of language: speaking, reading, writing and listening so that they can communicate at a basic level, considering that this will allow them to enhance their professional qualifications, and therefore to have easier access to appropriate working environments.

3.3 Participants

Considering the physical context; the fact that the school buildings are located far from each other, and that there are more than 20 schools within this system, it makes it very difficult to visit all of them. The number of students located in each school is large, and therefore it would have been very time-consuming to compile data from all the students, and the time given for the study did not allow for this. Therefore, the centers where this research was carried out were chosen strictly owing to their geographical situation. All of the schools are located in rural or semi-rural areas, therefore due to time constraints, means of travel, and difficulties of access, those which were more geographically accessible were selected.

The participants of this study were 32 students at three different schools of the same system (technological preparatory school) who attended the advanced English classes. The reason for choosing advanced students is because although they have English lessons in almost all of the semesters, those in the upper level have been there longer and are more familiarized with the school, the teachers, the programme, etc. Of that population, 30 students answered an open-ended questionnaire and 2 students were interviewed. All of the informants participated voluntarily since the researcher cannot force them to participate in the study (Miller et al., 2012). For this inquiry 19 women and 13 men participated, their ages ranging from 17 to 20 years of age. Both students who were interviewed were female, pupils of sixth semester now. All of the participants took part in the study voluntarily and signed an informed consent.

3.4 Instrument and Data Collection methods

Considering the geographical and physical situation of the schools mentioned above, a sample of the students was used for this study. This was considered acceptable given that in Grounded Theory there is no need for a large number of cases because the investigator's "job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967p.30). When carrying out any research, it is imperative not just to select the cases to study, but also to decide on the appropriate techniques in order to collect meaningful data that will help the inquirer to comprehend deeply the roots of the problem, its mechanics, how to approach it, etc. The research techniques that were used for this study were questionnaires and interviews, both using open-ended questions. According to Koshy (2005p.104) questionnaires:

> …at the start of a project can often be very useful because it helps you to collect a range of information with relative ease, which can then be followed up as necessary…[and] may help to shape the nature of the questions you may want to ask during any personal interviews or observations you may wish to conduct.

The questions were designed considering the main and sub questions of this inquiry, and put into a grid in order to systematically organize and analyze the information. In order to start collecting data, a 12-item open-ended questionnaire was administered (Appendix 1). The first five questions were directed at obtaining a general idea of the answer to the first sub-question of this enquiry which was about the nature of the positive or motivating factors that influence the students. The next three questions attempted to explore the nature of the negative or de-motivating factors that affect the students. The last four questions were aimed to discover the students' perceptions as to how to overcome or solve the negative factors. After the questionnaire was developed, it was piloted with two

high school students in the advanced English class in order to make sure the questions were understandable, and that meaningful information could be extracted from them.

After the questionnaire was administered, for it to be analyzed the answers were organized in a chart (Appendix 2). Relevant points started to emerge and from them an interview grid guide was developed. This was in order to elicit relevant information about the students' points of view, their thoughts and perceptions about the issues and situations that they encounter in the EFL classroom. The interview questions were designed considering that the

> Interview is not a clear window onto the interviewee's experience, rather it is the joint production of an account by interviewer and interviewee through the dynamic interaction between them…in order to obtain accounts that have a sense of structure and order and have probed and coaxed and steered away from certain topics in order to navigate a path through personal accounts that was recognizable to our research agenda
>
> (Miller et. al. , 2012)

The interview was intended to be an in-depth interview in order to extend the knowledge about their perceptions in a more open, meaningful way taking into account that "the process is a meaning-making endeavor embarked on as a partnership between the interviewer and his or her respondent" (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010p.94). It is a discovery-oriented method to obtain richer knowledge and understanding about the participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences that was considered the best option to use with preparatory school students to get richer information concerning relevant issues. Taking this into account, for this study two in-depth interviews were carried out, that is, two students were interviewed in two different visits. One to gather relevant data according to the information that emerged from the questionnaires, and another to

bridge gaps in the information, to clarify facts that were missing or aspects that needed deeper inquiry.

This instrument was a semi-structured interview, the interviewer tried to create a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere in which the students could feel respected and their opinions taken into account and considered important. In addition, as the theory and information was emerging from the data, without previous ideas or assumptions, it was important to let students talk about the issues that impact them with more liberty. Semi-structured interviews allow that because they:

> …allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them. In other words, while the researcher does try to ask each respondent a certain set of questions, he or she also allows the conversation to go in unexpected directions.
> (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010 p.102)

As normally happens within communication, the speakers may leave out some aspects that although may be clear and understandable for them, are not clear for the listener who is not totally aware of the context and situations in which certain events took place. Part of the communicative event is to make clear that the listeners have the complete message, that they understood it well and that the speakers' message was conveyed thoroughly. Following this idea and the concept of Grounded Theory, after the first interview was carried out and analyzed and some gaps were detected, the need to clarify that information arose. Therefore, another set of questions was developed for the in-depth interview. This new set of open-ended questions were created in order to carry out the second part of the in-depth interviews to use with both students to ensure that they were able

> …to describe what is meaningful or important to them, using their own words rather than being restricted to predetermined response categories. It provides high credibility and face validity and allows the investigators the flexibility of applying their knowledge, expertise and interpersonal skills to explore interesting or unexpected ideas or themes raised by the participants.
>
> (Klenke, 2008p.130)

The in-depth interviews were carried out during two separate visits in order to have time to analyze and reflect on the data, and design questions that could elicit valuable answers. After the second round of interviews, no new or relevant data was found. According to Grounded Theory this is called "saturation". Saturation "means that no additional data are being found whereby the (researcher) can develop properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967p.61). Therefore, the field research stopped at this point to reflect and organize the findings.

3.5 Data Organization

The data analysis and organization was carried out by means of Grounded Theory. After the questionnaires were administered, the answer to these questions were analyzed carefully, and from them, significant points, topics and themes were highlighted and drawn so as to find out the critical points. Extracts from the questionnaires were organized in a chart according to the category that they belonged to, and in order to get the 'bigger picture' in relation to where the inquiry was heading.

Taking into account the most relevant topics detected in the chart, an interview grid guide was developed and the semi-structured interviews were carried out. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Once this part was done, the process of analysis started

again, reading and highlighting in the transcripts relevant words, topics and themes that were emerging from the information. After the analysis it was observed that most of the information received from the participants corresponded to the categories previously identified in the questionnaires and relevant extracts from the interviews were also organized in the chart.

While analyzing the interviews, it was discovered that there were some gaps in the information. Some things were half explained, other times some answers were accompanied with laughs, leaving the message unclear in the sense that if those were the real answers or if there was something behind the laugh. Matters like this brought attention and the need to clarify those aspects was evident. Therefore a second round of questions was developed and the in-depth interviews were carried out. The relevant answers were also organized in the chart and as was explained before, the research findings reached saturation point.

3.6 Research Procedure

The first step in this research to understand the students' perceptions of their EFL class was the negotiation of the policies and administrative procedures with the Union. There were chats with the personnel from the Union where the objective of the research, the procedure and logistic aspects were discussed in order to obtain written permission to gain entry into the different schools. Obtaining the permissions took a lot of time because of the many activities that the union performs which complicated the arrangements for the meetings, and to gather the official written permissions. Permissions were also sent by the Union to the principals of each school by mail to inform them about the visits and the general aspects of the study and the visit.

In each center there was a brief talk with the principal to personally explain what the research was about, to answer any questions that they may have had and to assure them that the integrity of the students was not to be harmed or affected in any way. It was explained that for this inquiry only advanced English students could participate because they were the ones who had the longest time studying English, and, therefore, they had a better idea of all the situations surrounding the EFL classes (the school, teacher, programme, etc). Then it was explained that students had to participate voluntarily so no one would be forced to be part of the study.

Once the principals of the school were aware of what the study entailed, students in the last semester were gathered (in most schools not all the sixth semester students were called due to the school schedule and activities) and briefed on the generalities of the research. In each school, all the participants accepted voluntarily to be part of the study and proceeded to take their places in a separated, empty classroom in which they could answer the questionnaire in peace. The students were carefully informed about how to complete the questionnaires. They were assured not just by the consent letters, but also verbally, that all data would be used with the upmost confidentiality. Students took their own time to answer the questionnaires and then proceeded to put them in a sealed box.

Regarding the interviews there were some difficulties when they were to be carried out. Either the principal or the representative of the Union needed to be in the school to authorize students to leave the classroom for the interview, and a couple of times this was not possible due to the many activities and commissions that both of them have to perform. It is important to mention that when carrying out the first round of interviews, on one occasion I was asked to interview in the principal's office which may or may not have influenced the student's answers. The other interview and both of the follow up

interviews were carried out in one of the green areas, isolated from any personnel, the students or noise.

4. FINDINGS

This section will describe how the data was analyzed, in order to make sense of all the information that was gathered. Then, the findings will be explained in detail; they include quotations to exemplify the findings, and to make the information clear.

4.1 Data analysis

All of the information from this inquiry was analyzed by means of Grounded Theory taking into consideration that:

> Data collection leads to analysis. Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions. Questions lead to more data collection so that the researcher might learn more about those concepts. This circular process continues until the research reaches the point of saturation.
>
> (Corbin & Strauss, 2008 p.145)

After the questionnaires were administered to 30 students from three different schools of this technological preparatory school system, they were all mixed together in a closed box for anonymity purposes. Then the box was opened and all of the questionnaires were taken out. Each of the questionnaires was read thoroughly in order to get a general idea of the answers, of what the students' ideas were and the path that those answers were following. After a second reading, important words and recurrent answers were underlined in the questionnaires. While analyzing the information, similar words, concepts

and ideas started to be evident. Three central categories were drawn from that analysis. The main categories that emerged from the students' answers were about the teacher's practice, the classroom environment and the students themselves.

As the analysis of the questionnaires progressed, some subcategories started to surface because different aspects within each category were mentioned. Although some were more stated than others, all of them were taken into account, which was important to achieve the general notion of the students' perceptions. The three main categories, subcategories and what they are mainly about, is presented in the following chart:

Main categories	Sub-categories	Refer to :
Teacher's practice	Attendance	The presence of the teacher in the classroom (Or lack of it when they have to go to meetings or other activities)
	Activities	Everything that the teacher brings and does in the classroom in order to foster learning.
	Response to students	The way the teacher acts and reacts in the classroom concerning the activities, students' doubts and questions, classroom dynamics, etc.
	Evaluation	How students perceive the way they are being evaluated.
	Materials	All the different resources the teacher brings into the classroom in order to facilitate learning.
Classroom	Classroom	How students perceive either the classroom

environment		facility and/or the conditions in which it is.
	Relationship T-S / S-S	The interactions that occur within the classroom with the teacher or between the students
	School schedule	This sub-category is related either to the hour the class is given (in relation with the classroom schedule), or the amount of time dedicated to the class (classes per hour/week)
Students	Learning styles	The ways in which students prefer to work in the classroom because they consider learn better this way.
	Attitudes	Students awareness of the positive or negative attitudes that may help or detriment their own learning
	Cultural factors	Cultural aspects that make them more or less interested in learning English
	Personal interests	Individual reasons for their like or dislike towards learning the language
	Strategies/suggestions to improve	Students' own opinions on how to improve either their own learning, or their English classes.

After all the questionnaires were analyzed, and while organizing the categories and sub-categories another issue arose. There were positive and negative aspects within each of the sub-categories that were important to specify, in order to organize, clarify and understand the findings. At the end of this process, the main categories, sub-categories and the positive and negative aspects of each sub-category were integrated in one chart in which all of the questionnaires' data was organized.

Once the chart was put together, it was analyzed yet again in order to identify the first findings in relation to the questionnaires' outcomes. This helped recognize relevant aspects that students were mentioning that were important to enquire into in more depth. Following Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and as mentioned in the methodology section, from the analyzed data an interview grid guide was developed using open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview was carried out with two different students of one school in order to probe some of the most important aspects mentioned in the questionnaires.

The same process that was used to analyze the questionnaires was applied to the interview analysis. Relevant topics that emerged from the information were highlighted in the transcripts. Since the interview questions originated from the questionnaires, the most important aspects of the interviews were organized in the same chart. After the analysis of the first interviews no new categories were added to the chart.

After the interviews were analyzed, a new set of questions were designed to carry out the in-depth interviews in order to clarify and/or generate more knowledge about the most relevant aspects that appeared in both the questionnaires and the first interview. Both students were contacted again and were interviewed on the school premises.

After the second round of interviews no new data was found. The information the students provided revolved around the same topics, but with more detailed explanations and suggestions on how to improve the learning process in their specific context. Therefore, it was concluded that the research findings had reached saturation.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

In this section, examples of the findings will be shown. Although the questionnaires and interviews were carried out and answered in Spanish so that the students could be more comfortable and relaxed, they will be presented in English in this document.

a) QUESTIONNAIRES

Regarding the first category, the most mentioned aspects were the activities and teachers' responses to students. Students were able to express their opinions about what they enjoyed about the strategies that a teacher implements in the classroom. They liked that *"the teacher is very respectful and open…creates a trustful environment"* and the materials they use, especially *"the books because they are new".* However, there were also some negative aspects. Students felt demotivated *"when the teacher does not go to school, because without her there is no one who can clear your doubts".* Although they liked some of the implemented activities they do not like to *"translate, when the text is too big or not important"* or *"when the teacher explains something, everyone says they understood and she doesn´t explain it again".*

In the category "Classroom environment" students explained some aspects that they consider important concerning the dynamics that occur inside the classroom. Concerning the positive aspects, some students commented there is a good environment in the classroom. If they have *"a doubt the teacher helps me or my classmates", "there is trust and it creates a fun environment".* Nevertheless, there were also some adverse demotivating aspects according to the students, for example: *"the teacher´s attitude", "that the class is in the afternoon because it makes you sleepy and get too bored"* and *"sometimes the mess in the classroom distracts you and you start to get uninterested in the class".*

The category related to "Students" revealed students' reflections about their self-perception such as *"English is not for me"* which may be referred to past experiences with the language that had made them believe that English is too hard and they cannot learn it. Also cultural factors related to the learning and use of English. There was a student who considered that at some point he/she would have to interact with an English speaking person *"and why not show them that we are good even with something that belongs to them (their language)".* Many students had suggestions on how to improve their level; some of the recommendations expressed that they would like *"that learning was fun"* or their interest in *"doing sentences or plays in English"* because they consider they learn better; in addition, to learn "*to speak and write, because sometimes we just write and don´t know how to pronounce the words".* Another suggestion that appeared several times is the fact that *"teachers should be better prepared, and innovate their teaching practices"*.

b) INTERVIEWS

Both of the sixth semester students were females (S1 and S2) who have had five courses of English at this school. The semi-structured interview questions were intended to probe the most relevant points of the information gathered from the questionnaires. Only relevant examples of both of the interviews with each student will be presented.

FIRST INTERVIEW

S1- This student was 17 years old, and took English lessons while she was studying in a public secondary school.

S2- This student was 18 years old, and took English lessons in her public secondary school.

When they were asked to talk about what they liked the most about their English classes S1 said she liked "the way the teacher teaches, he makes it fun not so hard and he doesn´t demand too much". S2 voiced during the first interview that at the beginning of the

English course she was a little bit nervous, she *"had doubts but later…I was more confident and then I felt really good"*. These comments make evident how important it is to build a good relationship with the teacher.

Later on, they were asked about their favorite activities in the English class. One of the students stated she liked when they *"had to act in plays, because they had to practice their English".* The other student likes the fact that the teacher organizes "games and songs for us to sing, I really like that". Both of them expressed they liked to do activities in which they could move around, and practice their English at the same time.

The interviewed students agreed that the relationship with the teacher and their peers is good, and that they feel comfortable in the class as the relationship *"has been close, if we had a doubt, we asked the teacher or other classmates"*. Both of the students commented that they seek the help of their friends when they are nervous or when they have had difficulties during their classes; *"my friends used to tell me that everything was fine, that nothing was going to happen, we knew each other and that I shouldn´t be nervous"*. These comments reveal that positive relationships in the classroom may motivate students learning processes.

In the questionnaires and interviews, the topic about the problems they face in the EFL class was brought up. Some comments were about not understanding what the teacher was saying or difficulties in writing activities. When they were asked what were the most common problems or situations they encountered one of the students mentioned it was mainly *"the verb to be and all that…I used to forget which was before and which was after".* The other student commented her problems were *"when we had to give presentations, because I usually forgot things but then we practiced and practiced and I got less nervous each time"*. These comments seem to be about the students lack of memory, but possibly the real reason was their nervousness.

Part of the interview covered also the aspect of the materials they used in class and how they used them. One of the students commented that the teacher brought to class some of the materials that they used, but sometimes they

> *..were asked to research about a country and then we gave presentations…the teacher asked for materials from the students and if the materials were not enough for everyone then we shared them.*

The other pupil commented they worked with *"posters, slides and leaflets…the teacher brought his book and we made photocopies".* These comments give the impression that one of the problems is that the school does not provide enough teaching materials.

Regarding their insights, in general they both seemed to like the class and the teacher's performance. One of the students liked the way the teacher gave the class, she explained that she *"likes the way the teacher teaches, he makes it fun and not so hard".* The other student snickered while answering that the classroom environment was "really calm…very relaxed I really like it". It was unclear at that time what the snicker and the "very relaxed" meant.

When they were asked about their perceptions of their overall progress during the time they have been studying English, both students considered their progress had not been very good because *"I forget some things, I don´t remember, but then I read my notes y sometimes I remember, if not, I ask the teacher even if he is not giving us classes now".* Another comment was that the progress was *"very low…because English is not really my thing but what I´ve learned I try to review it so I don´t forget it".* Both students seemed interested in continuing with their English studies. They considered it can be a very helpful tool for their lives, especially for their future jobs.

SECOND INTERVIEW

After the analysis of the first interview, more questions arose in order to be able to understand some aspects where the meaning was not clear. The most relevant extracts are displayed in this section. As previously mentioned, I was asked to interview one of the students in the principal's office, only the secretary was there, but perhaps this affected the students' feelings towards being interviewed. This second round of interviews was carried out in a small green area away from any kind of interruption.

Both of the pupils expressed that their English class was not hard, that they felt relaxed there, but the meaning was not clear for me. When I asked for clarification they expressed that *"the teacher was not demanding if we didn´t speak English. He tried that we didn´t find English hard and he didn´t push us to learn it"*. The teacher also *"didn´t gave us a lot of homework, we did the activities at school so that we did not get too tired"*. These comments may be related to the comments on their low overall progress as perhaps if the teacher had assumed a different attitude they may have learned more.

Regarding the materials, both students commented that the teacher brought some materials and that they brought others. I wanted to know more about this aspect which was also present in the questionnaire answers. The students communicated that *"sometimes the teacher asked us (money) to burn a CD, or photocopies whatever we needed for class"* and they did not mind paying for it, but they would like *"that they (school) gave us some guides, some books because we have too few"*. Another observation from the students was that *"there should be more things to learn more English every day; it would be good that the teacher brought something more productive"*. This was also mentioned several times in the questionnaires; students feel the lack of sufficient materials and would like to be provided with more and interesting materials.

Most of the questionnaire results included suggestions on how to improve the lessons or the teaching approaches to meet the students' needs, and during the first interview they made a couple of suggestions also. One of the suggestions was to *"go out to the court to do sports while we say the name of the movements in English"* referring to tasks that require movement like *"educational dynamic, exercises...I mean, we did some but still".* One of the students suggested that they have more class time, *"that we had two hours, in the schedule I had we had classes on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Then we had two days and then just once a week".*

In sum, in this section the most significant comments of the interviewed students were presented. They were able to express themselves in a free way to expose their perceptions and insights about the issues that impact them in both positive and negative ways, as well as their suggestions on how to improve their learning experiences.

5. DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIONS

On the whole, after reviewing all the findings, it may be affirmed that students perceive that there are several factors that can impact their learning in both a positive or negative way, and that they are willing to take some actions to overcome the negative aspects. This section will discuss the issues encountered in the findings according to their type.

Regarding the issues that motivate or influence the students in a positive manner, one of the most important elements mentioned by students in both the questionnaires and interviews is the teacher. A teacher who is *´respectful´, ´open´* and *'sensitive'* is considered

by the students as a good teacher, a person in who they can trust, and who can help them learn better and achieve their goals. This is consistent with Shishavan (2009)'s study in the sense that students value a caring and considerate teacher and find these traits helpful when trying to learn. Teachers who create a respectful and relaxed environment, who *"inspire trust"* help students feel comfortable and willing to learn. This is related with the outcomes of the study showing that although students want to achieve their goals and acquire knowledge they want to do it in a fair and compassionate environment (Delaney, 2010).

Comments on the questionnaires and interviews reflected also that it is important for students to have a good relationship with their teachers and peers, and that in most cases this appears to be a reality. Most of the answers of the questionnaires showed that students have a good relationship with their classmates because they have *"communication between teacher and student"* and students seek each other's help when they do not understand something that was seen in class. During the interviews it was detected that although at first the student was nervous that there was a new teacher, she feels more comfortable now due to the environment that the teacher has created.

Regarding the activities, there were comments about how some activities implemented by the teacher such as games, songs and role playing motivate the students not just to learn, but to speak and like the language because it motivates them *"to learn more"* and *"it is fun to speak in another language"*. This seems to concur with what Green (1993 in Qin, 2012) discovered about how students prefer communicative activities. Their enjoyment corresponds often to the level of usefulness perceived by the students about the activities. It was also detected that students like to use varied materials that can help them learn better. This was supported by the students who were interviewed; they find

the use of materials beneficial for their learning and do not mind to have to pay for some of them (like CDs or photocopies)

All of the aspects mentioned above motivate students and stimulate them to learn the target language. Motivation is a very powerful tool and critical for student success. Student engagement is higher; they learn more and enjoy learning if they feel interested (Brophy, 1983). The knowledge of these elements mentioned by students could be the starting point for a change in teacher's practice which might be reflected in benefits for both teachers and students alike.

As previously mentioned, not just positive aspects influence the students in the EFL class. There are also demotivating or negative factors that impact them in different ways. Being aware of these issues, may help teachers and authorities to turn them into positive situations. In contrast with the above comments, some students considered their teachers as cold and distant and uninterested in the students. Teachers were described as with *"few abilities to explain the topics", "bad attitudes"* and no patience to *"explain again"* when they do not understand. Others expressed that teachers give too much work and homework. Researchers, in general, support the notion that teachers play a vital role in the learning process and outcomes, but it has to be taken into account the fact that teachers have to deal with

> …time pressure, large number of students with learning and emotional needs, heavy accountability demands from administrators and parents, and other stress producing situations that exist in many of our schools.
> (Mc Combs, n.d.:1)

Although most of the students stated that they liked the activities used in their EFL class, some others complained that some activities were boring and repetitive, without meaning

or real use. They also showed preference for group work, activities in which they could work with their peers instead of individual tasks, especially the ones in which they have to talk in front of the whole class. Students are ashamed of asking questions and participating out loud perhaps they do not want to lose 'face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Regarding the materials, even though many students stated that they like the materials they use, and that they found them useful for their learning objectives; they would like them to be more and varied. During the interviews it was evident that students were interested in having materials to use during their EFL classes. They would like *to "have more books"* because they have *"too few".* They are also interested in stimulating materials that can help them increase their language level. If the use of this type of materials is motivating for students and meets their needs, it would be relevant to consider their acquisition.

It was interesting, and at the same time perhaps incongruent, that although students want to learn the language and would like to continue studying English for personal or work related reasons, they like a *"relaxed"* environment. By relaxed they meant (according to the interviewees) that the teacher *"does not give a lot of homework",* and *"allows them to speak in Spanish"* if they wanted and did not push them to learn the language. However, they expressed that they considered their overall performance as low because they did not learn much, or as least they do not remember most of it. This might be an example of what Weiner (in Kight & Butzon, 2009) called attribution theory, in which certain individuals fabricate their own justifications for their accomplishment or failure which do not necessarily reflect the reality, but to internal or external factors according to their beliefs.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This inquiry was the first step of an action research aimed at improving teachers' practice. In order to do that, it was necessary to explore and examine students' perceptions of their particular context to be able to understand their feelings and insights. This will allow their needs to be met, and therefore, improve not just the teacher's practice, but also the learning experience of the students. The gathered data provides a general perspective regarding technological preparatory school students' perceptions on the nature of the different issues that impact their learning, either in a positive or negative way, as well as their opinions as to how they overcome the negative factors or problematic situations they may come across in the EFL class.

It was possible to identify that students find it motivating to have an accessible, flexible, "human" teacher who they can trust and look to for help, as well as varied, hands-on and meaningful activities related to their likes and needs, in which they can use their English and put into practice what they have learned. In addition, they would like to have useful and stimulating materials they can use to practice and strengthen their language skills. In contrast, a cold distant teacher can demotivate them and make them feel isolated. Boring and repetitive activities, with lack of meaning and use can diminish their willingness to learn and although it is true that most of them do not mind paying for materials or photocopies to use in the classroom, this seems to be prove how much they want materials that help them improve their learning.

These findings imply that in order to improve a teacher's practice, students' opinions should be taken into account for the simple reason that they are the ones who live and experience this teaching-learning process every day, and their attitudes, reactions and

perceptions are many times the reflection of what is happening (or not) in the classroom. The educator's teaching approaches are obviously not homogeneous, but they could all respond to the students' characteristics and needs.

This study did not examine the effectiveness of the English classes or corroborate the issues that may be impacting the students in some way. It was limited to the perceptions of the EFL technological preparatory school students about the nature of the issues that influence them considering the positive and/or negative factors that can motivate and/or demotivate them. Due to time and geographical accessibility constraints not all the teachers and students of this technological preparatory school system participated in the study, but the research findings provide useful elements to know the perceptions of the EFL students if teachers and/or authorities are interested in expanding this study.

In the second step of this inquiry, the results of the students' perceptions will be compared and contrasted with the results of the teacher's perceptions (see Margarito's research report) in order to find relevant aspects of both inquiries and decide which course to take. Always keeping in mind the objective of improving the teaching and learning process is to benefit both students and teachers. Change is not always easy, but if authorities and teachers work together, and include students as allies in the change, positive things may happen, keeping in mind that:

> Real change, then, whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty; and if the change works out, it can result in a sense of mastery, accomplishment and professional growth. The anxieties of uncertainty and the joys of mastery are central to the subjective meaning of educational change and to the success or failure thereof – facts that have not been recognized or appreciated in most attempts at reform"
>
> (Fullan, 2007:23)

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APPENDIX 1

EXAMPLE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

CUESTIONARIO

El siguiente cuestionario contiene preguntas para saber un poco más acerca tus experiencias como estudiante de Inglés. Por favor respóndelo con honestidad ya que la información que se obtenga será de beneficio tanto para los maestros como para los alumnos.

Esta actividad es individual y debe responder a tu experiencia personal, por favor no comentes o discutas las preguntas con tus compañeros.

Nota: Recuerda que este cuestionario es anónimo, por favor NO pongas tu nombre. Si necesitas otra hoja para responder pídesela al aplicador.

Edad: _____   Carrera que estu dias: _____

Sexo: (M)   (F)   (No deseo especificar)

1. ¿Te gusta tu clase de inglés? Sí, no ¿Por qué?
2. ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de tu clase? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Crees que estás lo suficientemente motivado en tu clase de inglés? Explica
4. ¿Consideras que tus participaciones durante la clase son importantes y tomadas en cuenta?
5. ¿Cómo consideras tus relaciones con tu maestro de inglés y tus compañeros? Explica
6. ¿Qué es lo que menos te gusta de tu clase de inglés? Explica
7. ¿Qué te hace sentirte desmotivado durante tu clase? Explica
8. ¿Qué dificultades has encontrado durante tus cursos de inglés? Explica
9. ¿Qué consideras que se podría hacer para solucionar las dificultades con las que te has encontrado?
10. ¿Qué necesitas para sentirte más motivado para aprender y hablar inglés?
11. ¿Crees que lo que has aprendido hasta ahora te será de utilidad en el futuro? Explica
12. Algún comentario final:

GRACIAS POR PARTICIPAR

APPENDIX 2

EXAMPLE OF THE CHART

Categories	Sub-Cat	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15
Teacher´s practice	Attendance					
	Activities	(+)Las palabras nuevas por que así voy extendiendo mas mi vocabulario (-)Que ponga tantas actividades	(-) [la clase] a veces es interesante (-) El hablar en inglés	(+)Me gusta cuando traducimos textos (-)Se me dificultó un poco formar oraciones	(+)Conocer palabras nuevas (-)[se me dificulta] la pronunciación de las palabras, ya que se escuchan de una manera y se escribe y se pronuncia diferente	
	Response to students		(-) A veces explica mal (-)[me desmotiva) La actitud del profesor	(-)La profesora debería ser más motivadora		
	Evaluation					
	Materials		(+)Los textos porque son nuevos			
Classroom Environment	Classroom					
	Relationship T-S and S-S	(-)La profe nos enreda	(-)No es buena		(-)Regular y con mis compañeros igual	(+) Me ayudan cuando no entiendo
	School schedule					
Students	Learning strategies					
	Attitudes	(-)No hay muchas participaciones		(-)[me desmotiva] que no nos motiven más	(-)Es una materia que se me hace un tanto aburrida (+)De tus errores que quizás cometes aprendes con la corrección de maestros	(+)[me gusta] el aprender a hablar inglés
	Strategies/ Suggestions to improve	Más práctica de la pronunciación	Practicar más Que cambien el	Que la maestra sea mas didactica	Echarle mas ganas y poner atención	Practicarlo más

		Un poco mas de atención de parte de la maestra	profesor		Que fuera divertido aprender	
	Cultural factors				.	
	Personal Interests	(+)Me gusta el ingles y le pongo atención por lo tanto me gusta la clase				(+)[Me gusta]Porque aprendo un lengua nueva
	Feelings			(+)Me llama mucho la atención y me gusta		

APPENDIX 3

EXAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW GRID GUIDE

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS -¿En qué semestre estás? -¿Ya habías estudiado antes inglés? -En esta escuela cuánto tiempo llevas estudiando inglés?	
What is the nature of the positive or motivating factors that influence students?	¿Cómo te has sentido durante tus cursos de inglés? ¿Podrías platicarme cómo es un día normal en tu clase? ¿Qué es lo que más te ha gustado de tus clases? ¿Recuerdas alguna situación, algo que tu maestro haya dicho o hecho que te haya gustado mucho?
What is the nature of the negative or demotivating factors that affect students?	¿Qué materiales utilizan en clase? ¿Te gustan? ¿Son suficientes? ¿Cuántos compañeros hay en tu clase de Inglés? ¿Cómo se llevan? Si ha habido alguna situación problemática ¿cómo la han resuelto? ¿Hay algo que no te guste de tus clases de inglés? ¿En general cómo consideras tu avance durante el tiempo que has estudiado inglés? ¿Te gustaría seguirlo estudiando? ¿Por qué?
What are the students' perceptions as to how to overcome the negative factors?	¿Cuáles son los problemas o situaciones más comunes con las que te has enfrentado al estudiar inglés? ¿Cómo las has resuelto? ¿En quién te apoyas para resolverlos? ¿Cómo crees que podrías mejorar tu experiencia como alumno de inglés?