Universidad Veracruzana
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EFL Students’ Expectations at a Training School for Workers

Presenta:
Paulo César Sánchez Flores

Co-Directores del Proyecto

Dr. Cecilio de Jesús López Martínez
Dra. Barbara Scholes G.

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ABSTRACT

This inquiry was the first step of an Action Research Project (ARP). The main objective of this research was to explore EFL students’ expectations at a Training School for Workers (TSW). Students’ expectations are an important issue given that they may influence either positively or negatively students’ motivation to learn. However, up to the present very little attention has been paid to students’ expectations in the research literature, especially in Mexico. In contrast, in the inquiry reported here, students’ expectations concerning the English courses, the institution, as well as their EFL teacher are reported. It was also useful to discover whether or not, these expectations had become a reality for the participants, as well as to what extent this situation had influenced the students’ motivation. This research was carried out at a Training School for Workers (TSW). The participants were 5 EFL third-level students and the methods used to collect data consisted on a semi-structured interview and a focus group discussion.

The resulting data was analysed by using aspects of Grounded Theory (GT). The findings obtained from the interviews revealed that most of the students attended this TSW to learn the language for communicative purposes, for educational and career goals, and for self-improvement. The collected information also disclosed that all of them liked to learn in a friendly, polite and collaborative environment. Regarding their English teacher, they expected to find a patient and supportive facilitator and provider; not only a teacher, but a friend who could give them advice when they had a problem. As a result, this inquiry may provide ideas and/or suggestions for educational institutions and teachers to improve their practice and the learning conditions, as well as to develop courses more in-tune to students’ needs and goals. However, how this may be achieved would be the following step in this Action Research Project.
INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the English language has become a very important language in the world. It has become the main means of communication in science, medicine, technology and even sports. In other words, the English language has become a global language. Crystal (1997:2) mentions that, “a language achieves a genuine status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country”. In Mexico, this language has become an important tool in the development of the country, and so it has become an essential element at every school level. This is the reason why most higher education institutions in Mexico, public and private universities, as well as technology institutes among others, ask their students to have a certain level of English before they graduate.

This is the case of the Training School for Workers (referred to as TSW from now onwards) where I have been working for the past thirteen years. People of different ages and from different walks of life attend this school in their free time, to develop through competencies, the knowledge needed for the jobs they are currently developing in order to gain a better status in life. During my teaching experience, however, at this school, I have noticed that many of these students appear to have different levels of motivation to really succeed, especially in learning the English language. After reflecting on this problem, it occurred to me that this possibly was happening because not only my expectations of my students’ performance were not being met, but perhaps theirs were not being met either. Therefore, I considered it was very important to discover what my students’ expectations were and are, and how these may influence their motivation to learn. This included what they expected or expect from me as a teacher, from the English course, and from the Institution they are attending. This information hopefully would help me to adequate my teaching practice so that their expectations would be met. In addition, possibly it would provide the institution with enough information to improve the learning conditions at the school so that students’ expectations may become a reality.

This final paper therefore, consists of four chapters that report the research process mentioned above:
• Chapter one describes the context and focus of the study;
• Chapter two presents experts’ definitions of the general concepts that helped me to understand and interpret the data;
• Chapter three explains the methodology and methods used in this inquiry;
• Chapter four includes the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the main findings of this inquiry and their implications, as well as the limitations of the research. It also includes recommendations for further investigation.
CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT and FOCUS

This qualitative research was developed at a Training School for Workers during the term January – July 2013. People come to this school to develop different strategies and work skills, as well as gain knowledge in different areas such as carpentry, welding, child care, computing and confectionery among others. The main purpose of this institution is to train people for work, and to apply what they have learnt at school while they are, in fact, working. As for languages, this school offers courses in English, French, Japanese and Italian. During these courses, mainly grammar, reading and writing are focused on, while listening and speaking are less practiced owing to diverse factors such as the lack of cd’s or audiotapes with conversations and dialogues to listen to the language, the lack of a tape recorded is another factor which does not allow to develop listening skills. About speaking, sometimes students do not want to speak the language due to the fear of making mistakes or being scolded by their teachers among other reasons.

As mentioned above, this TSW has its own expectations of the courses they offer, but they have never asked students about their expectations concerning the courses, the teachers, and the school. In addition, although I have asked my students why are studying at the TSW, the reasons why they are studying a second language, and the way they would like to learn; I have never asked them explicitly about their expectations. This was an important omission. I now realize, that it is of paramount importance to explore what students expect to achieve when choosing a school to learn English as a foreign language. This is confirmed by Longhinni (2001) who affirms that it is imperative for teachers to listen carefully to what their students have to say. In this particular case, it is essential to know what students expect. However, teachers need to be aware of the fact that although these expectations may be high or low, depending on each particular individual, they may seriously affect a student’s level of motivation in one way or another. Therefore, by means of this inquiry, it was hoped to discover what students expect from these EFL courses, from the institution, and especially from EFL teachers. As a result, ways may be found to modify EFL teachers’ practice, the methodology and materials used, as well as perhaps encourage the
school authorities to improve the learning conditions and adjust the curriculum in order to respond to students’ needs, goals and expectations.

Rationale

In general, students’ expectations seem to be influenced by diverse factors such as their motivation to learn, their needs and goals when learning the language, school policies and learning conditions among others. Unfortunately, however, there are not a lot of studies which consider the nature of what students expect from a course, a teacher and/or the institution. This lack of information does not lead to meaningful, and significant changes, consequently, some institutions even teach the same way they used to do 20 or 30 years ago.

Most of the students, who come to this particular TSW, seem to expect that they will develop the skills necessary to communicate fluently in English, to get good grades in their other schools and/or to learn the language to gain a certification etc. However, these expectations may lead to a growing lack of motivation when students discover that these expectations are not as simple to achieve as they had first thought. This may be owing to different factors. For example, nearly all schools claim to hold high expectations for all students. In reality, however, what is professed is not always practiced. Although some schools and teachers maintain uniformly high expectations for all students, others seem to have "great expectations" for particular segments of the student population, but minimal expectations for others. For instance, in many urban and inner city schools, low expectations usually seem to predominate (Lumsden, 1997:2).

The expectations teachers have for their students and the assumptions they make about their potential have a tangible effect on student achievement. Research, "clearly establishes that teacher expectations do play a significant role in determining how well and how much, students learn" (Bamburg, 1994: in Lumsden 1997:2). In addition, students tend to internalize the beliefs teachers have about their ability. Generally, they seem to
...rise or fall to the level of expectation of their teachers. When teachers believe in students, students believe in themselves. When those you respect think you can, YOU think you can
(Raffini, 1993: in Lumsden 1997:2)

Nevertheless, in contrast, when students are viewed as lacking in ability or motivation and are not expected to make significant progress, they often tend to adopt this perception of themselves (Lumsden, 1997:1). For example, when students discover that their teachers consider them "incapable of handling demanding work" (Gonder, 1991, in Lumsden 1997:2) this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, students tend to give to teachers as much or as little as teachers expect of them (Lumsden, 1997:2).

These are just a few of the reasons, why I considered it very important to know what my students’ expectations are, what they expect from me as a teacher, and what they expect from the institution they are attending. This knowledge will enable me to improve my practice, and provide the institution with enough information to help my students achieve their expectations. In sum, my main objectives were to:

- Explore what students’ expectations are concerning the course, the teacher, and the institution;
- Understand the nature and impact of students’ expectations.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were designed:

Main Research Question:

What is the nature of EFL student’s expectations at a TSW?

Research Sub-questions:

- What were EFL students’ expectations on entering a TSW context?
- How do school conditions affect whether or not EFL students’ achieve their expectations?
- How do teachers influence whether or not EFL students’ achieve their expectations?
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The main aim of this inquiry was to identify and explore the nature of EFL students’ expectations at a TSW. This was not an easy task, as peoples’ expectations can involve a combination of a number of diverse, but inter-related aspects to which each person may proportion a different level of importance. In this chapter, therefore, I present experts’ definitions of the main concepts that helped me to understand and interpret the data collected from a particular group of students, and so achieve this aim.

2.1. EFL Students’ Expectations

According to the Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, an expectation “is a belief that something will happen because it is likely”. The Oxford Thesaurus of English further defines this concept as “a strong belief about the way something should happen or how somebody should behave”. That is, an expectation is usually a hope that something good will happen. However, learning a second language involves a lot of factors which may make this process an interesting or frustrating experience for students. When they enrol on an English course in a particular school, students always have a number of expectations; these may be based on either educational or career goals. Unfortunately, not many people have paid attention to this issue. In Mexico, there are no studies which may give us an idea about how important expectations are in the learning process. However, according to Bordia (2006),

...expectations seem vital in fulfilling learner’s needs effectively. The fulfilment of students’ expectations may be directly linked to motivation and performance in language learning.

(Bordia, 2006:3)

In addition, apart from goals and needs “students’ expectations may be based on previous language learning experiences” (Bordia, 2006: 5). If this experience was negative in some way then “the lack of fulfilment of students’ expectations can lead to negative behavioural performance related to outcomes” (Bordia, 2006:14). This is why sometimes students may seem to be bored in lessons or simply seem not to pay attention in classes. Sometimes, this behaviour is not taken into account, and teachers
keep on teaching the lessons. However, this may be because students’ expectations are not met as “when expectations are not met, several negative consequences occur for the student, course and the educational institution” (Bordia, 2006:16). Students’ expectations may be influenced also by a number of issues such as needs, attitude and motivation. These are commented on in the following sections.

2.1.1 EFL Students’ Needs

In the Oxford Advanced English Dictionary a need is defined as a strong feeling that you want sb/sth or must have sth. The dictionary.reference.com on line defines this concept as the lack of something wanted or deemed necessary. Maslow’s model of the hierarchy of human needs (1954) includes five basic needs. The most difficult needs to satisfy are the ones at the top: esteem and self-actualization. Esteem is subdivided into achievement, status, responsibility and reputation which may help us to have a place, responsibility, status, prestige and independence in society (Maslow, 1970 in Bohlin, 2009:304). Self-actualization is subdivided into personal growth and fulfilment. This is achieved by managing effectively challenges, and by successfully facing new experiences, in other words by achieving a level of personal potential in personal growth (Maslow, 1970 in Bohlin, 2009:304).

According to self – determination theory, humans possess universal, innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (deCharms, 1976; Ryan & Deci, 2000 a). We need to feel autonomy, or self-determination to achieve an expected goal in life. That is, we perceive our behaviour to be internally controlled or self-regulated, leading us to have choices in our actions rather than being controlled or pressured (deCharms, 1986; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

2.1.2 Students and Achievement

Regarding the expectation of achievement, the WordReference on line English Dictionary, defines it as “something that has been accomplished, especially by hard work, ability or heroism. It indicates that something has a successful completion”. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (7th Edition) defines achievement as “the act or
process of achieving something”. It is understood as a thing that somebody has done successfully, especially using their own effort and skill. Therefore, it can be assumed that achievement is the successful completion of a stage, task or project, which involves the developing of skills and effort to achieve a goal or stated purpose. The need for competence is even considered as an innate desire to explore and attempt a mastery of skills (White, 1959). In the EFL context it is important to mention that an efficient teaching process may help students to achieve their goals and expectations. EFL students, in general, want and expect to achieve communicative competence.

Language competence, in particular is a broad term which includes several aspects in the learning process from linguistic and grammatical competence to sociolinguistic or socio-cultural competence (Manitoba Curriculum Framework Outcomes, 2009: 19). This term may be understood as the ability every human being has to speak and use any language. Language competence implies to interpret and decode a message to give a suitable response according to the situation the communicative process is taking place (Ibid). In our case, language competence has to be developed inside the classrooms, with meaningful activities which may allow students to use and manage the language according to their needs (Ibid). In other words, without sufficient exposure needed for learners to notice and acquire the language input and chances to use the knowledge, communicative competence is not likely to be promoted (Larsari, 2011:161).

Richards (2006, 2) defines CLT as “a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom”. CLT “sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence” (ibid). Language competence, as well as communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use the language for a range of different purposes and functions,
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and
informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication),

- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations),
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)

(Richards, 2006:3)

2.2. Aptitude and Attitude

Researchers have discovered different variables which may affect or benefit the fulfilment of a task or project. According to Young Monk (1998) these variables were identified as access and equality (Washington, 1901), financial resources (Woodson, 1933), personality and independence (Lavin, 1965), and self-esteem (Guggenheim, 1969). In other words, these researchers implied that ability was merely one of several variables related to academic performance. Other research findings have shown that “individual students’ characteristics variables such as motivational orientations, self-esteem and learning approaches are important factors influencing academic achievements” (Tella, 2007:150).

Attitude is especially very important since it directly influences the achievement of a goal or expectation. If someone has a positive attitude to accomplish a goal, he/she will do it faster than someone whose attitude is negative. The environment around us may inspire us to undertake the goals and purposes we set ourselves at some time in our lives (Richard – Amato, 2003: 111). For example, attitudes may be

...a result of previous experiences towards a project. They are strongly influenced by people in the immediate environment: parents, teachers, and peers.

(Richard – Amato, 2003: 111)
Therefore, attitudes towards self, the target language and the people who speak it, the teacher, and the classroom environment all seem to have an influence in acquisition (ibid), sometimes all these aspects may benefit the learning process if they are applied in the correct form, contrarily. However, when one or more of these components fail, the results are totally the opposite and the attitude towards the process may be lost. Attitude affects levels of motivation and can make a difference in a student’s academic career (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Dornyei, 2005; Skehan, 1989). This is why EFL teachers have the obligation to create the necessary conditions to increase their students’ attitude towards the language he/she is teaching.

### 2.2.1 Self-Efficacy

A very important aspect regarding students’ attitudes when they are learning a second language involves the self-theories. The first aspect to consider is about self-esteem. In a study carried out with some American college students of French as a foreign language in 1979, Heyde (in Richard-Amato, 2003,) found that students with high self-esteem at all levels performed better in the language they were studying. In general, successful learners appear to have higher self-esteem than those who are unsuccessful (Price, 1991). Albert Bandura’s (1986, 2001) social-cognitive theory provides us with several important concepts that are necessary for understanding student motivation and achievement: Self-efficacy, self-regulation and teacher efficacy.

“Self-efficacy, an expectation that we are capable of performing a task or succeeding in an activity, influences our motivation for the task or activity” (Bohlin, 2009: 297). It is a critical determinant of behaviour in school, sports, and social relationships (Bandura, 1977, 1997). To be motivated, we must have a high outcome and efficacy expectations. **Outcome expectations** are beliefs that particular actions lead to particular outcomes and **efficacy expectations** are beliefs that we have the requisite knowledge or skills to achieve the outcome (Bohlin, 2009). As we can see, these two concepts form what it is called intrinsic motivation. If students are really convinced they can do any task, if there is an inner strength which moves them to
achieve any goal, they will do it without any doubt. This is why “students with high efficacy and outcome expectations are confident about performing well in school tasks and persist when the tasks are difficult –that is, they are motivated” (Bohlin, 2009, 297). Students with low efficacy and outcome expectations are easily discouraged by failure and therefore are not motivated to learn (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent & Larivee, 1991).

Teachers, who want to enhance students’ intrinsic motivation to learn by increasing their self-efficacy, need to understand what experiences shape self-efficacy. Individuals develop self-efficacy from four sources (Bandura, 1982; Bussey & Bandura, 1999, in Bohlin, 2009:298):

1. *Past performance.* Students’ self-efficacy improves when they achieve mastery and attribute their success to ability or effort (Scholz, Dana, Sud & Schwarzer, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000).

2. *Observing the performance of others.* Observing the performance of someone who is similar to yourself can help you develop self-efficacy. When students lack personal experience with a task, it is especially important that the modelling be similar to them (Schunk & Miller, 2002).

3. *Verbal persuasion.* Verbal persuasion includes reassuring individuals that they will succeed or encouraging their efforts. Parents who encourage their children to try different activities and provide them with support for doing so encourage their children’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

4. *States of emotional arousal.* Fatigue, stress, and anxiety often are interpreted as indicators of lack of competence (Scholz et al., 2002; Tollefson, 2000). Confidence and eagerness, in contrast, are emotional signs of competence. Individuals with higher efficacy show decreased stress, anxiety and depression when they are confronted with demanding school tasks, while those with lower self-efficacy tend to exhibit depression, anxiety, and helplessness (Bandura, 1997; Scholz et al., 2002).
As it can be observed, self-efficacy is influenced by several factors which may motivate or de-motivate learners. Self-efficacy also influences self-regulation in learners (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in self-regulatory processes such as goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and effective strategy use (Zimmerman, 2000, in Bohlin 2009:299). Many of these processes are linked to intrinsic motivation. Students with high self-efficacy choose more difficult tasks or challenging goals to complete since they are completely sure they have developed the abilities and competences to succeed in those tasks (Bohlin, 2009:299). As they are intrinsically motivated to achieve the assignment, they respond more positively to negative feedback since they take it as a new challenge to fulfil (Pugh & Bergin, 2006; Seijts & Latham, 2001 in Bohlin, 2009: 299).

Therefore, negative comments may become an outer strength which may reinforce their inner motivation to achieve a goal or task. These kinds of learners have better skills to succeed, and they select the most effective strategies such as organizing information, making connections, rereading material, making outlines, and monitoring performance (Bouffard-Bouchard et al., 1991; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990). This is also evidence they are really confident about their abilities and capacities to complete successfully any task they want to start.

2.3. Motivation

According to Ryan and Deci (2000: 54),

To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated

Motivation may be an inner or outer, strength or inspiration, which allows human beings to achieve a goal or expectation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 54). In addition,
People have not only different amounts, but also different kinds of motivation which vary not only in level of motivation but also in the orientation of that motivation

(Ibid)

This is why it is important to know why we want to learn something, what are the benefits and/or rewards someone could receive by learning something. Moreover, establishing clear expectations when we enrol or face a new project in our lives is necessary, as

A student could be motivated to learn a new set of skills because he or she understands their potential utility or value or because learning the skills will yield a good grade and the privileges a good grade affords.

(Ryan & Deci, 2000: 55)

2.3.1. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

In Self-Determination Theory (STD; Deci & Ryan, 1985) researchers distinguish between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. This is why there is a huge distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. “Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable. Intrinsic motivation exists within individuals, within their relationships between other individuals and activities, but it is important to mention that not everyone is intrinsically motivated by a particular task” (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 56). Consequently, this kind of motivation has become an important phenomenon for educators as they consider it to be a:

...natural wellspring of learning and achievement that can be systematically catalysed or undermined by parent and teacher practices

(Ryan & Stiller, 1991, in Ryan and Deci, 2000:55)

This why I considered it highly important, in my case as an EFL teacher, to know the reasons why my students enrolled on the English courses I teach, what they expected from me as a teacher, and from the institution. The information they gave
me has helped to improve by modifying my teaching practice and selecting the most efficient strategies and techniques to help them achieve their goals and expectations. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to an outcome (Deci & Ryan, 1985:55) “it has typically been characterized as a pale and impoverished (even if powerful) form of motivation that contrasts with intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985:55). Extrinsic motivation may be the “outer” reward someone can have because of achieving something. The clearest example may be when parents give a kind of prize to their children because they received a good mark, finished school, won a contest etc. This may imply they do not feel intrinsically motivated, and even may be they do not like the task or project they are taking, but they will receive a reward just by fulfilling it.

Students can perform extrinsically motivated actions with resentment, resistance, and disinterest or, alternatively, with an attitude of willingness that reflects an inner acceptance of the value or utility of a task, this is when both types of motivation are presented in different situations or conditions. In some cases,

...many of the tasks that educators want their students to perform are not inherently interesting or enjoyable, knowing how to promote more active and volitional (versus passive and controlling) forms of extrinsic motivation becomes an essential strategy for successful teaching

(Ryan & Deci, 2000: 55)

In sum, individuals need to be motivated to achieve any goal or expectation they may have. Some important factors that may help them are the self-determination they might have to succeed in society. However, there must be a need for competence in order to develop personal growth. Internal needs are considered vital to fulfil any goal or expectation in human beings’ lives. Nevertheless, to feel safe enough to explore their environment, individuals also need to feel relatedness, or a sense of being securely connected to others (Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995).
3. Teachers and Students’ Expectations

In school contexts, students’ relationships with their teachers and teachers’ efficacy are very essential aspects which might affect and/or influence students’ processes of personal growth (Bohlin, 2009:300). Teachers with high teacher efficacy also are more open to using interactive approaches such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, problem based learning because they believe these types of activities enhance learning (outcome expectation) (Tollefson, 2000, in Bohlin, 2009: 300). This is why teachers with high efficacy are more willing to try new instructional methods. They tend to use more self-directed activities and small group discussions and to show persistence when helping students who are having difficulty (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Teacher’s efficacy, a belief by teachers that they have the skills necessary to teach all students effectively, positively influences student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, 1998). Teachers develop outcome expectations (a belief that all students can learn the material) and efficacy expectations (beliefs about their own ability to help all children learn) (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Unfortunately, however, like students, teacher may have low levels of teaching efficacy due to different factors, for example the lack of resources to implement a good class, the school policies that sometimes do not allow teachers to develop their lessons as they would like, the pressure of the union that does not permit them to fulfil their teaching activities due to impromptu meetings etc., the lack of support by the institutions and parents may also represent a serious issue for teaching efficacy, and students with low levels of effort and poor achievement contribute to diminish the levels of efficacy in some teachers (Tollesfon, 2000; in Bohlin 2009). If teachers are demotivated or influenced by external factors these may diminish their levels of teaching efficacy, and as a result he/she may limit his/her students’ motivation to achieve their personal aims. Nevertheless, as the teacher is one of the main components in the learning process, he/she has the obligation to create an effective environment for learning the language.
Creating an effective environment, however, is not an easy task. Language teaching has changed a lot over the years, now it is accepted that

*Language teaching is a complex issue, encompassing linguistic, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, pragmatic, as well as instructional and curricula dimension.*

(Thanasoulas, 1999:49)

Owing to this, language teachers now have to modify their teaching practice. Nowadays, new theories of language learning based on the students’ needs and expectations have been developed and pupils play the main role inside the classroom. Consequently, teachers are now seen not only as providers of the language, but as orchestrators, through diverse strategies and techniques, of the students’ learning processes. Therefore, teachers have changed from being the people with “authority” within the classroom to the ones whose participation in class forms a crucial part of their students’ learning processes, they have to help their students to achieve their goals and needs, since “learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning” Richards (2008:23), here it is where the role of teachers represents a very important part in the EFL learning process.

Nowadays, language learning is also a difficult process owing to students’ expectations, their goals and needs for learning the language, and their prior experiences, or when faced with learning language for the first time among others (Khamkhien, 2010). Many times, prior learning experiences may affect and impact a lot when they are facing a new project, for example students’ former practices when learning English if they were effective, if students learnt the language and they liked the way they were taught, may affect positively when learning English in future levels, but if their experiences was not effective or beneficial to them, this may cause a negative impact and they may even feel they hate the language. That is why

*The Progressivist Approach takes a holistic view of the teaching-learning process, with the aim of fostering the students’ development of the whole persona in an unregimented way.*

(Thanasoulas, 1999:46)
This means that students today play a more important role in the learning process since they are not just prepared for improving themselves as students’, but also as better people in society.

As EFL teachers, in order to achieve the goal of having a successful teaching practice to help our students acquire the English language, and so achieve their expectation, we have to put into practice a lot of methods, strategies, techniques and activities, as well as use all the resources and materials we have at hand. This is why we have to be up to date with the new technologies and information in order to provide what our students really need. Therefore, EFL teachers, according to their students’ level of proficiency, must offer their pupils the most appropriate materials, web pages, links, books, even technologies they can use to enrich the acquisition of the English language.

All this is linked to the role of being a facilitator.

**The facilitator (the learning facilitator) - A view of a more student-centred way of learning requires the teacher perform a role as a facilitator or manager of the students’ learning**

(Harden & Crosby, 2000:334)

As a facilitator, an EFL teacher needs to enable his/her students’ learning process by giving them different ideas, advice or suggestions about how to improve their language acquisition. This role may be similar to the language provider, but it is not. The main difference here is that in the previous role the teacher only suggests the materials and things to do and he does not participate in the process, he/she only suggests to students what to do or what materials they can consult (Harden & Crosby, 2000:334). With the facilitator role, teachers have to monitor what activities their students do, they have to assess them giving as much feedback as possible so that the pupils may maintain their interest in learning (Ibid).

EFL teachers also have to design activities which give their students the opportunity to use the language as if it were being used in a real context. As a designer
an EFL has to create the conditions for learning to be achieved (Harden & Crosby, 2000:334). I think teachers always have to ask their students how they like to learn, which activities they would like to use inside the classroom and invite them to give comments or suggestions for improving the class and being part of their own learning process. According to Harden and Crosby (2002), this is part of the resource developer’s (The resource material creator’s) role is important as

*The need for learning resources materials is implicit in many of the developments in education. Teachers have to suggest students the technologies they make have access and make it much easier for the students to take more responsibility of their own education. This role offers exciting possibilities. Teachers possess the array of skill necessary to select, adapt or produce materials for use within the institution.*

(P.335)

It is also important to value students’ efforts and take into account their comments in order to improve the class. EFL teachers have the obligation of motivating his/her students to learn the language by praising them with a “well done”, “good job”, “pretty good” and some other similar phrases since “Teachers can foster positive relationships with their students by conveying respect and compassion for students, by listening carefully to them, and by responding to their needs and feelings” (Darling-Hammond, et al. n.d., p. 94). This may cause students to feel important and motivated in the class since their teacher is acknowledging their efforts in their learning process.

In sum, as EFL teachers, we have to play some other important roles such as being an adviser, a friend, a sociable person inside the classroom, a promoter of practice among many others which complete the ones described above.

As it has been exposed lines above, in this chapter I mentioned what author and researchers have written about the students’ expectations as well as some other concepts related to the EFL learning process. In the particular field of expectations, in Mexico there are not many studies which show how important the achievement of
students’ expectations is in order to develop efficient EFL learning processes. Some concepts merely linked to expectations were described and discussed in this chapter. In the following chapter the methodology used for collecting data about students’ expectations as well as the instruments administered are described in detail.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the qualitative research methodology implemented in this inquiry which took place at a Training School for Workers during the term January – July 2013. It is divided into four sections. In the first part, qualitative research is defined, as well as why this approach was selected for this project. I also define case study and the reasons why I chose this type of “methodology” in particular, for developing this inquiry. In section two, I describe the participants who provided the information for developing this project, as well as how they were selected as the informants for this paper. In the third part, the data collection method is included. In the fourth part of this chapter, I explain the data collection process, and how the data was analysed using aspects of Grounded Theory.

3.1. Research Methodology

As it was mentioned lines above this present project forms part of an action research project which was developed based on aspects of a qualitative research approach. I will start describing some aspects of what action research is and implies.

According to Wallace (1998) this term means:

“A way of reflecting on your teaching (or teaching-training, or management of an English department, or whatever it is you do in ELT). It is done by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analysing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be.”(p.4)

On the other hand, this type of research focuses on the implementation of actions to solve specific problems in classrooms and schools. Carr and Kemmis (1986 in Macintyre 2000, p.61) explain:

“Action research aims at improvement in three areas: first the improvement of a practice; second the improvement of understanding of the practice by its practitioners; and third the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place. The aim of involvement stands shoulder to shoulder with the aims of improvement”.

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By analysing these definitions, I understand that action research represents a useful technique for self-evaluating and modifying our teaching practice in context, by selecting a series of activities which may help us to have better classes and improving ourselves, positively, as EFL teachers. It implies a lot of reflection on what is happening in our classroom, taking some actions, designing activities, collecting data from those activities implemented, evaluating them and re-using them if necessary.

That is why Carr and Kemmis (1986 in Macintyre 2000, p.61) say:

“a special characteristic of Action Research is that is carried out by teachers in their own teaching situation, which means that only students that are already engaged in regular teaching can choose to do this type of research. In Action Research, normally a problem is identified and reflected on, with relevant literature consulted, after which a course of action is designed, carried out and evaluated. This reflective cycle can then be repeated until the problem is solved or overcome”.

Regarding the Qualitative methods, they are an appropriate and desirable approach for studying things in their natural settings. It is an experience based on discovery that provides an interpretation of how people make sense of their world. Its main purpose is to recognize the multifaceted interpretations of human experience within their social and cultural systems (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In brief,

...it is a multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalist approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 3)

This 'multi-method in focus' is described by Flick (2002) as

...the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation.

(Flick, 1998: p. 229)
“Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities – the capacity to learn from others” (Patton, 2002, p. 7) These kinds of methods have been developed to analyse social issues taking into account people’s experience and points of view about a specific situation as the main source for collecting data. In particular, according to Gass (2001, in Bordia, Wales, Pittman & Gallois, 2006: 5), “qualitative methodology encourages participants to introspect on the process of learning, which is a major goal of SLA research”.

In short, as Silverman (2000:1) mentions “if you are concerned with exploring people’s life histories or everyday behaviour, then qualitative methods may be favoured”. This, therefore, was the main reason why this kind of methodology was chosen, as I wanted to discover what my students’ expectations were regarding the English courses at this TSW. In addition, Singleton et. al., (1988:11) states that “researchers have to immerse in the social issue they are inquiring in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the situation”. Therefore, I explored what was happening in this TSW regarding my students’ expectations about the English courses offered at this school. The data collected allowed me to know if these expectations were fulfilled or not, and to propose some solutions to help my current, and future students achieve them more efficiently.

3.2 Case Study

Within qualitative research, there are different possible approaches such as Biography or Life Histories, Case Study, Ethnography and Phenomenology. Based on the objectives and goals of this present inquiry, case study was chosen as the most appropriate. Researcher Robert K. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as:

...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

(p.23)
According to the above definition, a case study research studies present day, real-life situations in their particular contexts. Thus, Gerring (2004) defined the case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (p.342). One situation, unit according to Gerring (2004), is selected, investigated, and analysed in order to propose a possible solution to an issue or problem. In order to achieve this,

...a case study seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the setting, and which hast to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to a research question

(Gillham, 2002:2-3)

Consequently, this kind of research method often asks one or more questions beginning with “how?” or “why?” As a result, I was able to discover my students’ feelings, comments and perceptions about what they expected from this TSW, the English course, and the teacher.

3.3. Research Participants

For this study, five third-level students were selected as participants. These third level students were chosen as they had the highest attendance level; also they are a very heterogeneous group aged between 20 to 53 years old. They are 4 women and 1 man with different goals, interests, professions, academic backgrounds, as well as having a different economical status. Regarding their professions, 1 woman is a kindergarten teacher, another is a Telebachillerato teacher, another one is a Teleseconday school teacher, the fourth one is a nutritionist and the man is an engineer. They used to take English classes at this school from Monday to Friday, 10 hours a week, 2 hours daily. Their classes were from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. They have been studying here for almost 9 and half months.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

A semi-structured interview was chosen as the main resource for collecting data in order to discover students’ expectations when they enrolled in the English courses at this TSW. This decision was based on the fact that during qualitative interviewing, interest is focused on the interviewee’s opinion and the perceptions they
have according to their personal experience. In addition, qualitative semi-structured interviews are flexible and adjustable (Kvale, 1996).

In a semi-structured interview, the researcher designs a series of questions for specific topics to be covered, which is often referred to an interview guide. The interviewee is free to answer whatever he/she feels like (Kvale, 1996). If an answer does not satisfy the interviewer, he/she has to elicit answers from the responder by using questions such as: why do you say that?, what do you mean?, what else?, amongst many others until he/she receives the information he/she is looking for. The flexibility this type of interview offers is that the questions may not follow on exactly in the way they were designed, and more questions can be added to the original set or list of questions according to the interviewee’s responses which makes the information collected richer (Kvale, 1996).

This particular semi-structured interview (Appendix 1) included 15 questions divided into four main categories: the reasons why they had enrolled in this TSW, students’ expectations of the course, students’ perceptions of the school conditions, and finally the fourth set of questions were designed to know what these students expected from their EFL teacher at this school.

3.5. Research Procedure

The main goal of this project was to explore my students’ expectations about the EFL course taught at this TSW. A semi-structured interview was designed to collect data; this had 15 open questions. This interview was carried out with the third level students in May 2013. Initially, I only expected to interview these students since they were the only group I had at that moment. Unfortunately, the results of this interview were disappointing since my students did not give me much useful information since their responses were mostly yes or no answers. This was obviously owing to my lack of experience as a researcher, Therefore, I rearranged the questions, but this time I organized the interview as a kind of a chat among friends, and I encouraged them to
give more complete answers. In other words, this was a “focus group” interview (Rabiee, 2004).

According to Rabiee (2004:655) a focus group interview is used for “exploring what individuals believe or feel as well as why they behave in the way they do”. In addition, a focus group, according to Lederman (in Thomas et al. 1995), is

...a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being “focused” on a given topic.

(p.655)

This second interview was more helpful than the previous one, as the students seemed to be more at ease, and mentioned that they preferred to be interviewed in this way. As a result, I was able to obtain richer data.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using aspects of Grounded Theory. Grounded theory may be defined as: “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 2). Charmaz (1995, 2002) identifies a number of features that all grounded theories have:

• simultaneous collection and analysis of data.
• creation of analytic codes and categories developed from data and not by pre-existing conceptualisations (theoretical sensitivity)
• discovery of basic social processes in the data.
• inductive construction of abstract categories.
• theoretical sampling to refine categories.
• writing analytical memos as the stage between coding and writing.
• the integration of categories into a theoretical framework.
The students’ responses were carefully analysed in the following way. First I transcribed all the responses; they were in Spanish because the students felt more confident answering in their own language rather than in English. Then the most relevant answers were highlighted using open coding (Strauss & Corbin (1998). That is, relevant words and ideas were identified, given a name and categorized. To this end a chart was designed to house these categories to allow me to compare and contrast the findings obtained which are presented in the following chapter of this inquiry.

3.7. Research Context

This research took place at a Training School for Workers (TSW) in the state of Veracruz. There are 18 schools throughout Veracruz. TSWs are a branch of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, (the National Education Department in Mexico). These schools are institutions where diverse training courses are offered with the main purpose of training people for work, and/or while they are working. People attend TSWs to develop, through competencies, the knowledge they need in order to do their jobs and to achieve higher living standards. At TSWs people can find courses regarding Carpentry, Electricity, Welding, Computing, Confectionery, Clothing Industry, Child Care, among courses.

The particular TSW focused on in this inquiry has a nomadic population of around 600 hundred students per week who attend the different courses offered there. The ages vary a lot from 14 years old to 70. This school offers English, French, Japanese and Italian at different schedules from 7:00 a.m. in the morning until 9:00 p.m. There are 11 classrooms in this TSW, of which only one that is shared with other courses is assigned to the English course. There are 4 180-hour English language courses. There are weekly courses and there are also courses on Saturdays and Sundays. Throughout the week, the courses last for about 4 and a half months and on weekends they are extended to 8 or 9 months each. This school, in contrast to others nowadays, does not have the goal to prepare students for a specific certification such as KET, PET, FCE or TOEFL, instead after 720 hours of study, it is supposed that
students achieve an intermediate level in the language, however, in reality this rarely seems to happen.

Regarding the teaching resources, there are very few tape recorders or overhead projectors for use in the classrooms, therefore teachers often have to bring their own if they need or want to use them. The school provides manuals which include all the aspects related to the language such as the material needed, the time specified for each topic, the purposes and goals of the EFL courses, among other things. However, there have not been any reforms since these manuals were written and so they do not consider the new learning and teaching theories that have developed in the last 20 years.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

There are many people who seem to enjoy a challenge, however, according to Bandura (1993), there are many others who try to choose the activities and settings that they expect will enable them to succeed in their goals. An example of one of these settings is the school where they chose to learn English. A number of these expectations seem to have been accomplished by some of these students; while others have not. This chapter, divided into three sections, presents the nature of these expectations. Section one, reports their expectations on entering a TSW context; section two, defines their expectations regarding the learning conditions at the school; and finally, in section three, students’ expectations of their EFL teacher are described.

4.1. EFL students’ expectations on entering a TSW context

At this particular Training School for Workers, the research participants interviewed seemed to have shared a number of expectations on entering this school. These expectations may be classified into both efficacy and outcome expectations (Bohlin, 2009) as they appear to revolve around predictable benefits in both their working status and practice, as well as in their personal lives. However, it was interesting to note that perhaps the main expectations concerned correcting the outcomes of their prior language learning experiences.

4.1.1 Professional Development

This first category includes two kinds of development: one regarding a financial incentive, the other professional growth. One of the main reasons, especially for in-service teachers, to enroll in this school was that they could obtain a diploma at the end of the course that would earn points to improve their pay scale in the system where they work. This was mentioned by one of the participants, in the following extract.

Porque a nivel curricular, el documento que nos entregan al terminar un curso tiene un valor que, pues para uno docente en formación
In other words, obtaining the diploma offered by this school would assure this participant to have better options, and work opportunities within the Mexican Education System. This is important as previously, EFL teachers in Mexico were not required to have an official teaching or foreign language qualification, however, nowadays, the Mexican educational authorities are encouraging teachers to sit examinations in order to acquire one (Scholes Gillings de González, 2011). This also explains why this participant commented that another reason she had begun this language course was “porque la escuela me lo pedía”. This means that she had no choice.

Some students also attend this school for personal development, as one participant mentioned

A lo mejor muchos de nosotros lo estamos haciendo por opción personal, no tanto porque estemos obligados por alguna necesidad que implique capacitarnos o que nos sea requerido para algo en específico

Interestingly, although this participant commented she did not consider relevant learning a second language at present, she is convinced that English would be important for her in the future,

...no me es indispensable aprender el inglés. A lo mejor por los tiempos que me está tocando vivir se vuelva básico

In above case, even though it was not compulsory for her to learn the language, she recognized the importance of learning English nowadays and how this language would facilitate her life.
4.2 Future Competence

This category includes comments made by the students about the future use of this language in their lives, in their professional or personal future. For example, one of the participants said she was learning English at this school because she will teach it at her school, regarding this she stated: “porque lo necesito también para el nivel en el que voy a trabajar que es nivel secundaria” (S1). Another classmate also commented she wanted to learn English because at the school level she was working, she needed to teach at least the basic words and a lot of vocabulary to the children: “Para vocabulario de los niños de preescolar, porque ya se les enseña vocabulario” (S3). In addition, she was aware that in the future it would become more and more necessary to know English:

...porque también tarde que temprano en mi trabajo lo voy a necesitar con lo de las reformas educativas

She recognized the importance of learning the language since, in recent years there have been a lot of changes in the Educational system at all levels. Now, it is a compulsory subject to teach, so she noticed the usefulness as well as the benefits of learning this language.

A third participant interviewed, cited some friends who had suggested that he studies at this training school. Apparently, he had the impression that the English level he would achieve at this school would not be adequate. However, he got motivated enough to go on and decided to finish all four levels. In addition, he stated that an English diploma would gain more labour opportunities. He also expected to study an MA and so studying at this TSW would allow him to achieve these goals in the future.

...me di cuenta que realmente es un buen nivel de inglés que me va a servir para posteriormente estudiar una maestría y ehh, bueno agregarlo a mi curriculum

(S5)

In conclusion, it appears that the students understood and knew the importance of studying and learning English, they knew this language has become a
global language (Crystal, 1997) since it has achieved a special status and recognition not only in Mexico, but in the world.

4.3 Correcting prior EFL learning experiences

Despite the fact that the participants were learning the language while this inquiry was being carried out, it was interesting to discover that findings emerged relating to prior learning experiences. Some students had enrolled at the school with the expectation that they would achieve more than they had achieved previously in other courses. In particular, these prior practices may affect students’ sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a critical determinant of behaviour in school, sports, and social relationships (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Some of these students recognised that their efficacy had not developed as they had expected during their time at school. For example, one student commented the following:

...el inglés ahora es muy importante poderlo si no hablar bien mínimo pronunciar de forma adecuada y en ese sentido, bueno al menos el mío no es tan ideal como yo quisiera

(S2)

According to her perceptions, there seems to be two moments in her life. Firstly, she thought it was necessary to speak even with pronunciation mistakes. Now, she realizes of the important of an adequate pronunciation. This participant seems to be saying that she has not been able to learn to say at least basic things so she felt kind of frustrated, not with the program, the teacher or the institution, but with herself. Also as she was aware of the importance of this language nowadays, she felt a kind of frustration because of her lack of efficacy in English. Other students also seem to agree with this, for example, another student stated:

Yo tengo un nivel de inglés muy bajo y la verdad yo me daba cuenta que mucha gente incluso mis hijos tienen un nivel de inglés más elevado y que yo no podía ayudarles en nada.

In the above extract, it can be understood that this participant felt frustrated about her lack of efficacy in English as many other people seem to be able to learn something with which they have certain difficulties. This is emphasized when she
states that “incluso mis hijos tienen un nivel de inglés más elevado y que yo no podía ayudarles en nada”. This is a vivid example of how prior experiences may affect any learning process. This is precisely where frustration becomes evident. Therefore, as Longhinni (2001) affirms it is imperative for teachers to listen carefully to what their students have to say, their opinions, expectations, goals, problems and so on, in order to not only select the most appropriate teaching and learning strategies, but also understand the affective issues involved.

The following two participants also explained why their prior learning experiences had not been successful. For example:

...mi inglés no ha sido nada bueno en todos los sentidos, especialmente en el poder comunicar... y a lo mejor porque también nos tocó una época de inglés mucho más gramatical de apréndete esto no importa si lo hablas o no lo hablas, con que lo puedas escribir es suficiente, era otra metodología y para traducir adecuadamente creo que nuestro inglés funcionaba. En la actualidad pues ya no es así.

Furthermore, she also added:

..a mí en lo personal el inglés no me agrada, nunca me ha gustado el sonido ese tan, ehhh, casi que se está uno ahogando para poderlo pronunciar adecuadamente. Otra, mi pronunciación desde que yo empecé a estudiar los primeros años inglés, nunca ha sido muy buena. El hecho de que me pusieran a traducir eso me caía muy mal, me sentía yo muy incómoda y sobre todo cuando el maestro decía “no se pronuncia como se escribe, ustedes no lo tienen que leer así que no sé qué...”, entonces eso me empezó a molestar todavía más y sobre todo porque decía que un indio no podía aprender otro idioma tan fácilmente

(S2)

It may be inferred that this student had felt demotivated in prior English learning experiences. She had been taught in a traditional way. She had learned to translate and memorize vocabulary and expressions, but she had not been taught any kind of communicative skills. Apparently, these experiences made her think that learning the language was too demanding and irritating. These two factors may lead to frustration as well. In addition, at that moment, she did not see English as a useful
language to learn, she knew she had to learn it, but she did not enjoy it. There was not intrinsinc motivation. Perhaps that is why she did not perform well in class.

Another interviewee, who is almost the same age as the previous one, mentioned that during her prior learning experiences in the official school system, there had been no continuation, so she had been taught the same content repeatedly. This made her feel annoyed and lose interest in learning this language. Once again, this informant was demotivated. She commented:

...en las escuelas que yo estuve la verdad de los pronombres no se pasaba, toda la secundaria y la prepa, cuando yo la hice hace mucho tiempo, de ahí no pasaban los maestros, entonces yo tengo un nivel de inglés muy bajo

(S3)

Furthermore, apart from losing interest, prior negative learning experiences may even make people afraid of failing. Negative learning experiences may provoke lack of confidence and fear to be unable to succeed in an evaluation process, as one participant commented that “porque si la verdad yo venía con mucho miedo... a no entenderle y reprobar a la primera” (S3).

In sum, prior performances regarding the language may be positive or negative. Depending on what the students experienced, these might affect their present and even their future. Regarding this, Bordia (2006) stated that “students’ expectations may be based on previous language learning experiences and future goals and needs” (5). The lack of fulfilment of students’ expectations can lead to “negative behavioural performance related to outcomes” (Bordia, 2006:14). This is why sometimes our students may show lack of interest in the class, the language or the activities and some students tend to quit the courses. This kind of behaviour may affect the environment inside the classroom and even it might be passed on to other classmates, this is what Bordia (2006) mentioned “when expectations are not met, several negative consequences occur for the student, course and the educational institution” (16).
4.4 Learning conditions

Learning conditions are vital to develop a positive learning process (Brown, 1987). The findings reveal that students feel more motivated and comfortable when they have the necessary conditions to learn the language. However, a student commented on one vital condition to generate an adequate learning atmosphere and therefore a positive learning experience:

...más apoyo de parte del instituto en cuanto al aula... no tener un aula en particular es algo que sí debería procurar el instituto, darnos un espacio apropiado para la clase.

(S3)

The above informant underlines the fact that this school lacks of an appropriate educational setting as there is no assigned room for the English course. Another student also made reference to the different materials and resources that they would like to have access to:

Probablemente para el aprendizaje de inglés sería tener acceso a diversos materiales didácticos llámese computadoras, redes, libros, audios, eso favorecería el aprendizaje del idioma inglés

(S1)

It was clear, therefore, from the findings that the students were not comfortable with the conditions with the fact that they did not count with adequate resources “pues cañón, ehh, videograbadora, mmm, no sé tal vez DVD para ver algunas películas o algunas proyecciones en ingles” (S3), in other words, audio-visual equipment.

...con equipo audiovisual que podamos ver, no sé, otro tipo de materiales o incluso escucharnos a nosotros mismos la manera en que estamos hablando.

(S1)

Today, it cannot be denied the fact that up-to-date resources and technology may motivate and enhance a positive learning environment as expressed by the next informant. For example, appropriate technology would
facilitate the listening skill improvement, but an adequate space is also required.

Yo creo que más que nada sería en cuanto a un espacio de sonido, un espacio donde el alumno, como en mi caso que no nos es muy grato y que la pronunciación en si nos cuesta demasiado, le fuera un poco más favorable con temas específicos empezando desde los sonidos básicos como serían los sonidos consonánticos o los sonidos vocálicos que ya unidos entre sílabas pues ya no es el mismo sonido que pareciera escrito o que le damos cuando no lo sabemos pronunciar de forma ideal.  

(S2)

Younger students also added:

Pues, libros, audiovisual, cintas, internet yo creo, tal vez yo creo más este más libros, no o el internet tal vez que fuera un poco más, más abierto hacia la, hacia la materia de inglés que aquí se imparte.  

(S4)

It can be noticed that students are now more accustomed to the use of technology for improving and completing their learning processes. For example, regarding the use of the internet Bogdanic (2012, 1) stated that

...the current generation of college students in particular have literally grown up with the internet, and are often more technologically literate than their parents and professors.

This is why teachers and EFL teachers, in this case, have to be updated concerning the new advances in technology to suit the new challenges that education now demands, and so cover students’ expectations. However, this school seems to lack even the most basic of these conditions. It is interesting to note though, that even when learning conditions are believed to play a very important role in students’ learning processes, they do not seem to be a factor that has influenced the fulfilment or not of students’ expectations at this school.

4.5 Students’ expectations of their EFL teacher, peers, and course.

In this section, students’ perceptions about their EFL teacher, the course, their peers, and the way they would like to learn are described. Regarding the teacher, they
mentioned that they needed a patient teacher. According to them, a teacher should be a person who could understand students. This is due to the fact that some of them were mature students who thought that they could not learn in the same way as young people. This is presented in this section. For example, patience seems to be a vital characteristic for a good teacher as one informant expressed:

...pues con paciencia digo porque, este, le digo los jóvenes aprenden rápido y a eso están, en cambio algunas personas que ya somos más grandes no tan rápido, somos lentos y bueno yo, yo hablo por mí soy lenta y luego sin tiempo para estudiar pues sí necesitaba yo una persona que me tuviera bastante paciencia porque a la primera de cuentas igual y podrían tronarme por no tenerme la paciencia de, de, a lo mejor el maestro quería que yo pensaba y si el maestro luego luego quiere que hable yo y que estructure y no, o sea no voy a poder.

(S3)

This participant was older than the rest of the class so she felt she had a big disadvantage regarding her classmates who were younger than her. In an informal conversation, she mentioned she had not had positive learning experiences when studying English. Her teachers made her feel anxious and felt she could not learn the language. Perhaps, her teachers were too strict, and they were not polite with her. In order to be motivated, she would have needed a teacher who could have supported her. She needed to have been understood.

Regarding the EFL course, prior experiences played a very important role in the students’ responses, the most meaningful was:

La verdad yo pensaba que iba a ser muy difícil conforme fuéramos avanzando, cuando comenzamos el primer curso que usted decía “es que aquí son cuatro cursos y este y vamos a ir poco a poco y cuando ya vayan en tercero”... yo decía, no, yo no voy a llegar al tercero, o sea era una situación que digo, que yo venía con mucho miedo sí.

(S3)

Concerning their peers, most of them felt comfortable with each other, the differences in ages, backgrounds and even ideologies have not affected the way they have worked during the courses. Some of the most relevant comments were:
Pues en su mayoría siempre son estudiantes, son jovencitos chavos de 14 – 15 años los que atienden a los cursos, la mayoría, por lo mismo de que está estudiando en la prepa o en la secundaria piden el inglés pues ya algunas veces por motivación propia deciden estudiar el inglés pero no, la gente grande por lo general no toma los cursos y es bueno cuando llegas a un salón y ves gente en tu curso porque así, no solamente es como que del tema que viene en el libro sino que a veces se presta para hablar de otras situaciones personales.

(S4)

In this case, there is another informant who shares this point of view, but he adds the importance of feeling comfortable may enhance self-efficacy.

Yo esperaba compañeros con los que pudiera aprender en conjunto, es decir quienes pudieran apoyarme cuando tuviera alguna duda, con quienes pudiera tener una amistad más allá del salón de clases y pues en este grupo si los he encontrado, eso es algo que me motiva más a venir a esta escuela y en particular a esta clase”

(S5)

The comments made by these two participants showed and emphasized the importance of creating a good atmosphere in the classroom. As one of them said she was older than some of her classmates so she felt pretty comfortable because their classmates supported her when she had a question or doubt about any English content and that is why she kept on the courses. As it was mentioned previously, “students learn and perform more successfully when they feel secure, happy, and excited about the subject matter” (Boekaerts, 1993; Oatly & Nundy, 1996, in Darling-Hammond, et al. n.d., p. 90) and peers play a very important role in this.

In conclusion, in this section I presented the most important and relevant comments made by the students during the semi-structured interview. Their comments have enriched an ordinary vision teachers usually have about their students. In addition, they presented the importance of bringing together different factors such as teachers, students and physical conditions, if the purpose is to promote a positive learning atmosphere. These findings were relevant because they come from personal experiences regarding the EFL learning process and are about a real context. In addition, teachers and authorities may gain awareness of what students really think and expect.
CONCLUSION

As previously mentioned at the beginning of this report, this inquiry was the first step of an Action Research Project (ARP), focused on discovering, and understanding the nature of EFL students’ expectations at a Training School for Workers (TSW). Students’ expectations were considered an important issue to explore and examine, since they may influence either positively or negatively, students’ motivation to learn. By means of this inquiry, students’ expectations concerning the English courses, the institution, as well as their EFL teacher were discovered, as well as to what extent these expectations had become a reality for the participants, and influenced students’ motivation. In particular, regarding EFL students’ expectations on entering this TSW context, both efficacy and outcome expectations (Bohlin, 2009) were identified. These results showed the need take some actions to improve the EFL teaching process at this TSW.

Most of these students do not attend this TSW apparently because they are obliged to do so. Most of them come to this school because they expect to learn, they have specific learning outcomes, defined by Watson (2002:208, in Maher 2004:1) as “being something that students can do now and that they could not do previously ... a change in people as a result of a learning experience”. These learning outcomes are strongly related to their needs and goals. These students showed interest in professional development and improving their competence. Regarding the EFL courses at this TSW, students expect that learning English will be beneficial to them. Some of them study the language because they want to obtain a diploma which may give them a higher status in the Educational system so that they can get a better salary or payment, and of course a different kind of life. Some others, although they are not English teachers, think that some time in the future they will teach the language, that is why they are preparing themselves for facing this challenge when they need it. Others enrolled in this school for personal development.

Perhaps, more importantly, a very interesting finding was that many students had enrolled at this school because they had expected to learn what they had not achieved during prior language learning experiences. This may imply that “when
expectations are not met, several negative consequences may occur for the student, course and the educational institution” (Bordia, 2006:16). An example of this is unsuccessful prior EFL learning experiences. Some of the students acknowledged that at the beginning of the first course. They affirmed they were anxious and/or afraid because they had had not positive experiences in their previous English courses at different schools. Therefore, they did not really know what to expect from this new learning environment.

To a certain extent, these expectations have been achieved. Although they have not finished the course yet, and so do not have the diploma. Such diploma may give them a higher status in the educational system where they work. Most of them were satisfied with their improved competence in the language. Nevertheless, they expressed that they hoped this competence would improve further. In addition, they expressed that during the courses, they had begun to feel better and more confident in the language. In addition, they seemed to be enjoying this particular learning experience, and so were managing to overcome their lack of self-efficacy fostered by their prior language learning experiences.

In contrast, the learning conditions, an appropriate space for taking the lessons, appropriate equipment and school conditions, were not the ones the students had expected. It was discovered that there is a lack of equipment, and an adequate classroom where they can develop effectively their EFL learning process. However, it seems that this is something they have learnt to cope with, and fortunately the learning conditions at the school have not had a relevant impact on their EFL courses. This may be because, they have found a good atmosphere and a relaxing environment at this school which has allowed them to keep on learning even when some of the conditions, school policies and equipment, are not as adequate as they had expected.

Therefore, it may be concluded that a positive atmosphere plays a very important role in this process. An important element of a positive atmosphere is having a positive relationship not only between teacher and students, but also among students. The relationships at this school generated a cordial, confident and relaxed
environment where students have the opportunity to practice the language, and solve doubts without being punished or scolded when they have questions or commit a mistake in class.

Finally, concerning how teachers influence whether or not EFL students’ achieve their expectations, it was confirmed that the teacher plays a vital role in this process. Students expected to have a patient teacher, a person who could understand that some of them do not learn in the same way as others, and who do not have the same skills as the rest of their classmates, perhaps because of their age and/or educational background. They also expected a teacher who had the knowledge to transmit the language to them and motivate them, as

When teachers believe in students, students believe in themselves.  
When those you respect think you can, YOU think you can
(Raffini, 1993: in Lumsden 1997:2)

This expectation seems to have been met. On the one hand, the teacher not only had showed patience, but interest in them as people. Also they mentioned that it was good for them that their EFL teacher had high expectations of them.

Implications

As mentioned previously, “the fulfilment of students’ expectations may be directly linked to motivation and performance in language learning” (Bordia, 2006:3). These findings therefore, are very important because they may encourage teachers to correct or modify their EFL teaching practice, for as Longhinni (2001, 34) affirms “it is imperative for teachers to listen carefully to what their students have to say”. Paying attention to students’ expectations represents a challenging opportunity to improve the way we, as EFL teachers, are doing their job. The EFL teacher has to motivate his/her students with meaningful activities which are related to daily life events. In this way, teachers may help students to achieve their expectations, goals and needs in a better and easier way. This is important, as nowadays students are more active than they used to be in the past, this appears to coincide with Thanasoulas’ (1999) statement that:
Students are not passive subjects anymore, on the contrary they are looked upon as self-actualizing individuals whose cognitive, emotional and educational needs are to be respected and promoted.

(p.46)

Therefore, teachers need to plan better lessons and improve their teaching practice in order to help students’ expectations become a reality. In this way, not only may students’ personal interests or goals be achieved, but also those of the teachers. This can be very rewarding when students come and thank the teacher because of the class or because he/she helped them to solve a problem they had when learning the language.

“When expectations are not met, several negative consequences occur for the student, course and the educational institution” (Bordia, 2006:16). These negative consequences may be students dropping out of the EFL courses which may affect the TSW, the course and obviously the teacher in many ways. Therefore, educational institutions and “program coordinators may use students’ expectations to create courses more in-tune with students’ needs; this would be beneficial for all. This may lead to positive word-of-mouth recommendations and result in attracting future students” (Bordia, 2006:17).

These participants gave me interesting information concerning the importance of listening to the students, their feelings, their perceptions and their expectations. All of these comments could help EFL teachers to improve their lessons by paying attention to what students need (Darling-Hammond, et al., n.d.).

Another piece of relevant information regards to the learning conditions, resources and equipment. When students have an adequate space with appropriate materials, they feel motivated to keep on learning and attending to classes. However, the lack of this basic things at this TSW would be one of the possible reasons why students do not attend classes on a regular basis or maybe they quit their courses. I consider the staff in charge of this institution has something to do about it.
Limitations

This inquiry was based on my intrinsic motivation to understand the nature of my students’ expectations in order to later reflect on, and implement at a later date, ways that may enable them to achieve their expectations. I was also very concerned if I could detect how to improve my teaching practice in a way that would help me to succeed in this task. To this end, apart from carrying out field research, I also examined the literature regarding students’ expectations. However, although, I discovered that there is hardly any research that focuses on this issue, the aim of my inquiry was not centred on the generalization of my findings based on a number of students’ perceptions. This is because I am aware that different types of students. In other contexts, they may have different expectations owing to “their idiosyncratic dynamically interacting characteristics and thus context-specific” (Scholes Gillings de Gonzalez, 2010: 271) characteristics. This is also very much the case in this particular context, because the students at this school have different ages, and studies and/or jobs. Therefore, instead, I was more focused on reflecting how these findings may help my future students given the implications mentioned previously.

Further Research

The following step in this Action Research Project is to retake the findings of this paper and design a course. Such design should take into account the official contents, but adapted to my students’ background and expectations. The information obtained will be useful, may be, to reorganise the contents of the courses we offer at this TSW, to choose the most appropriate textbook and extra material based on students’ real needs.

Personal Reflection

This research has provided me with a lot of valuable information. All the comments made by my students have given me the opportunity to see the importance of knowing their expectations and what happens if their goals are not met. Therefore, I am now aware of the need to identify my students’ expectations at the beginning of every course in order to improve my practice so that these expectations may become a
reality. If this is possible, then I may be able to maintain their motivation in learning EFL.

I also had the opportunity of learning about qualitative research methodology, in particular action research, and how important it is to understand what people think and feel. However, this was the first time I had carried out research which is why there were many difficulties I had to overcome. The main one was to understand the different instruments, novice researchers may use to collect information about a specific topic, and especially the data analysis. I did not know how to interpret the information provided by the participants, but now I have gained some experience.

Therefore, it has been a hard road especially as it was not easy to be working and developing this project at the same time, but the learning experience has been satisfactory, especially as I now understand more about my working context and the relevance of serious research.
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APPENDIX 1

Semi-structured interview

This qualitative semi-structured interview was aimed to explore the students’ responses regarding their expectations when enrolling in this school.

the school policies and teachers influence which may impact on their level of achievement and motivation.

Main research question:

What is the nature of EFL Ss’ expectations in this particular Training School for Workers (TSW) context?

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<th>Research sub-questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
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<td>What were EFL students’ expectations on entering at a TSW context?</td>
<td>When did you start studying at this school?</td>
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<td>Why did you decide to study at this school?</td>
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<td>Who or what influenced your decision?</td>
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<td>What did you expect to achieve by studying here?</td>
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<td>What did you expect to find here?</td>
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<td>Were these expectations satisfied?</td>
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<td>Why do you feel that your expectations have or have not been achieved?</td>
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<td>How do school conditions affect whether or not EFL students’ achieve their expectations?</td>
<td>What resources did you expect to find at this school to help you learning?</td>
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<td>What resources would you like to have access to in the school to help you learning?</td>
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<td>How do teachers influence whether or not EFL students’ achieve their expectations?</td>
<td>What did you expect from the teacher when you began studying here?</td>
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<td>What kind of relationship do you have with the teacher?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Does he/she help/encourage you to learn?</td>
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<td>Is the teacher interested in you as a person?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is the teacher aware of how you would like to learn/what you want to learn/what help you need etc?</td>
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