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The impact of rural contexts on high school students' attitudes towards ESL: a qualitative study

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes of high school students towards English as a second language (ESL) class in rural areas, focusing on understanding the influence of contextual factors. A qualitative method was used for this research and data was collected through a survey in a rural high school. The findings reveal a complex relationship of socio-cultural, educational, and community factors that shape students' attitudes towards ESL. Due to the challenges faced, such as limited resources and exposure to English outside the classroom, many students demonstrate negative attitudes towards ESL. The study highlights the importance of considering context in understanding ESL attitudes and provides insights for educators to enhance ESL learning experiences in rural high schools.

Keywords: English as a second language, student´s attitude towards English learning, high school education, rural schools.

Resumen

Esta investigación examina las actitudes de los alumnos de una escuela preparatoria ante clases de inglés como segunda lengua en zonas rurales, enfocándose en comprender cómo influyen los factores del contexto. Para la presente investigación se utilizó el método cualitativo y se recolectó información mediante una encuesta a los estudiantes de la escuela preparatoria de una zona rural. Los hallazgos del presente trabajo revelaron una relación compleja de los factores socioculturales, educativos y de la comunidad los cuales impactan en la formación de las actitudes que tienen los alumnos de preparatoria ante el inglés como segunda lengua. Debido a los desafíos que se enfrentan, como los recursos limitados y la poca exposición al inglés fuera del salón, muchos estudiantes demostraron actitudes negativas hacia el idioma. Este artículo realza la importancia de considerar el contexto en el entendimiento de las conductas hacia el inglés como segunda lengua y propone nuevas ideas a los educadores para mejorar las experiencias de aprendizaje del idioma en las escuelas preparatorias de zonas rurales.

Palabras clave: el inglés como segunda lengua, actitud del estudiante hacia el aprendizaje del inglés, educación media superior, escuelas rurales.

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Attitudes in ESL

The process of learning a second language is not as easy as it may seem, most students can get frustrated when they have some difficulties, however, this process can be easier when the language is both meaningful and functional to the student (Zulkefly & Bakar, 2019). Gilbert (2005, in Carrillo, 2009), mentions that our brain is designed to help us survive, therefore, each time there is new information, our brain makes an analysis of whether the new knowledge is useful to survive or not. If the result of this analysis is that the information is not important, it will probably not stay in our brain. This is what students analyze when teachers present a new topic, their learning greatly depends on the attitude and importance that students give to the new knowledge.

Noursi (2013), mentions that attitude referrers to the students´ perceptions, understandings, beliefs, or experiences of learning English as a foreign language. Dark (2005, in Altmann, 2008), on the other hand, define attitude as a learned predisposition to behave in a constant way towards an object or objects, or a persistent mental or neuronal state of readiness to respond to certain class of objects, not necessarily as they are but as they are perceived. Taking this previous explanation about attitude and referring to it to a classroom context, students have a certain attitude

towards classes according to their beliefs about the subject and it impacts on their behavior towards it.

To have a better perception of the term attitude, Getie (2020) mentions three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The author explains that the cognitive component refers to the beliefs, ideas, or opinions about the object. Some students have a negative opinion about a foreign language since they might think that adopting a new language means they need to get rid of their native language, or that they need to adopt to new cultural practices leaving behind what they do now. This situations impact on the attitude and makes the learning process harder. The affective component has to do with the feelings and emotions that one has towards and object, it basically is about the students´ likes and dislikes. If the students like English or the English class, there will be a better opportunity to learn the language. Finally. The behavioral component which refers to one´s consistent actions or behavioral intentions towards the object. In other words, finding out what are the students´ actions towards English, if they dedicate extra time to the language other than in class, like watching a movie or listening to music in English, the learning process will be easier for the students.

Altmann (2008), also agrees that the term has a cognitive, affective, and behavioral component, and he adds that it is a response to a stimulus. Therefore, the personality and previous life experiences may have an important impact in the attitude people have towards certain situations or things. Zulkefly & Bakar (2019) also agree that the negative attitudes that students have are due to past experiences. Students may have felt humiliated by their peers, friends, family members or teachers when they tried to practice English. Therefore, attitude influences on the students´ behavior, their inner mood, and their learning (Getie, 2020).

Adding to the students´ experiences, Brown (2014) mentions the learner's language ego, which is understood as the identity that the student develops and is referred to the language that he or she speaks. If the students do not feel comfortable with the language proficiency that they have, their participation in class may be low because they will not want their peers to hear them. Moreover, if the students do not feel part of the learning process it will be harder for them to make the knowledge theirs and feel identified with the new language, so they might lose interest, impact in their attitude and with that, the motivation.

The author also states that attitude can be highly influenced by peer pressure, for example, if inside the classroom all the students have a certain domain of the second language and there is one that does not, he or she will feel the necessity to keep up with the rest of

the class. The opposite situations would be one where this student is the only one in the class that has an interest in learning and practicing a second language, in this case, the attitude towards the language may be affected in a negative way, since the student would be afraid to not fit in.

In fact, Brown (2014) suggests that a person´s self-identity is inseparable with one´s language and that a cognitive activity is difficult to achieve without some degree of self-esteem or self-confidence. Therefore, there must be a belief in the students that they have the capacity of performing the activity. If the student has a good attitude towards the tasks, they will be motivated and the students´ motivation is linked with the achievement of the language and it cannot happen without it (Nurhidayah, 2020). Motivation is an important aspect of second language learning, nonetheless, attitude should not be viewed as a component of it, rather, attitude should be identified as a separate factor that affects motivation (Widodo, Ariyani & Setiyadi, 2017).

To deeply understand the importance highlighted previously of students´ belief they can achieve a task efficiently, Brown (2014) suggests three levels of self-esteem, global self-esteem, situational self-esteem, and task self-esteem.

Global self-esteem refers to the general assessment that one makes during our lives, in other words, people evaluate what they can do or are not able to do in a general way according to past experiences. If a student has tried to learn a second language before and failed to do it, the second time they try it they will have a negative attitude because of the last experience. Situational self-esteem is an evaluation that the person makes about the task that can be achieved in a particular context. For example, in some cases, there are students that do well in class, but if they speak to a native speaker, they get nervous and some express that “they forget everything they know”. Finally, the task self-esteem refers to performing a certain task in a particular situation. Language learning, then, fits in the level of situational self-esteem.

It can be inferred that the learner that has a positive attitude has a strong intrinsic motivation, and they are more likely to accomplish certain goals. Dörnyei (2009) provides an L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) with three components (Nhat-Anh, 2022), ideal L2 self, ought to L2 self, and the real self.

The ideal self-aspect refers to the future self of the language that the learner would like to become. If the learner has an important goal to reach that implies to learn English as a second language, then it is more likely that motivation is present. This might indicate that the leaner is inclined to learning the language. If

the learners do not see themselves with a future where English is a part of it, students may will not have much interest in acquiring the second language.

The feature, ought to L2 self, has to do with the external pressure that the learner is receiving to learn a second language. In the context of young learners, this pressure come from family members, more specifically, their parents. Having this weight over them, makes them feel obligated or expected to learn. Sometimes, it can turn out to be a beneficial strategy because students learn a second language to avoid punishment of some type, but in other situations it might be counter-productive and drive students to have a negative attitude towards the language learning process.

Finally, the learning experience that the author states refer to the context in which the language is taught. It is not the same if there is a student learning English in a native English-speaking country than a non-native speaking country, for example. It also refers to the interaction the students have with the language.

In the research that Zulkefly & Baker (2019) performed, it was concluded that the students felt that they would be a lot more interested and enthusiastic about learning English as a second language if the teacher changed their teaching styles. Noursi (2013) also concluded that the attitude of the students he tested was not affected by the teacher's nativity, like many could think, rather it was affected by the teaching methods and the learning atmosphere that the teacher creates for the students. In addition, research done by Forero-Rocha & Gómez-Rodríguez (2016), highlighted the importance of understanding students´ voices and opinions regarding the class and to consider the social needs to promote a respectful and fair learning environment. All teachers should consider that students have different needs, preferences, beliefs, learning styles and educational backgrounds so if the student feels an imposition of change, it will cause a negative attitude towards the new knowledge (Noursi, 2013).

Egocentricity is also an affective factor that may have a great impact on a young learner´s motivation (Brown, 2014). As students grow, they become more aware of the context that surrounds them, what is acceptable or not, so they act carefully to protect their self-identity. This might be important to considerate in the classroom because if the learner is surrounded by others that have a negative attitude towards learning a second language or are apathetic, then he or she will probably feel the same way about it.

Gardener (1985) mentions five characteristics of attitude to be considered in learning a second language:

a) attitudes are cognitive and affective,

b) attitudes are dimensional rather than bipolar; they

vary in a degree of favorability and unfavourability.

c) Attitudes predispose a person to act in a certain way, but the relationship between attitudes is not a strong one.

d) Attitudes are learnt, not inherited, or generally endowed.

e) Attitudes tend to persist, but they can be modified by experience.

As it has been discussed, there are many factors that can affect a student´s attitude towards the class or the second language. It mostly is an individual feeling that students gain depending on experiences, future goals, family beliefs and their preferences. Even is the rural context can be more difficult since it is far from being a perfect second-language learning context because of the lack of tools to practice a teacher can have the opportunity to change some of these perspectives by considering that all students have different points of views within the planning of the classes.

Methodology

This study was applied in a rural school in the community of Villa Victoria located in the State of Mexico in Mexico. There are only three groups in the school, one for first grade (10th grade) with 35 students, one for second grade (11th grade) with 28 students, and one for third (12th grade) with 24 students. There is a principal, a vice principal, a pedagogue and two counselors. One of the counselors oversees two groups, first and third grade, and the other oversees second grade. There are 18 teachers working in this high school, most of the teachers had to do an aptitude exam to work in the school. This means that each teacher must have previous studies about the subject they are teaching. However, this has only been true for the teachers that have entered the school system in the last five years, previously, many teachers were hired without any evidence of their knowledge.

The school has very limited material, and sources regarding tools needed for education, there are only two projectors, no televisions, no speakers and although there is a computer lab, the computers do not function properly and there is no internet connection. In the classroom each students have the most essential tools like chairs and boards but not in very good conditions since some chairs are broken and the boards are somewhat old. The classrooms have curtains that help students see the board better since the sun shines right through the window. This year, with the help of teachers, students and parents, a wall was constructed around the school, this helped a lot so the animals like cows, sheep or turkeys do not get in the school or classrooms.

Most of the students enter first semester with a very low level of English. Most of the students just identify certain vocabulary but they do not develop any ability like reading, writing, or speaking. This situation makes achieving the goal that the English program presents difficult to achieve. The English program of Technological High School indicates that the goal for the third grade English class (fifth semester), is that students should able to read critically, communicate and sustain their ideas in an effective form with a clear written and speaking expression (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2019).

There is no other space than English class for the students to practice English, each class is only three sessions of 50 minutes each a week. During class, Spanish and English is spoken since the students have a negative attitude when they do not understand what the teacher is explaining. Also, there is only one English teacher for all groups, and she attends all grades, from first to fifth semester.

The study was done with second and fourth semester students since there is no English as a subject in sixth semester, 49 students in total. Students were sent a questionnaire with four items that aimed to know about their attitude towards the English language and the English class. The questions were in their mother language so they could understand completely, three were presented to them in a Likert scale from one to five, being 1 the least they agree and 5 the most they agree with the statement given. One was presented to the students so they could rate with which statements they agreed with more in a scale from 1 to 10. The questionnaire was sent by Google Forms to each student, and some were printed for those students that did not have access to internet.

Results

First, the three questions that were asked using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 are analyzed.

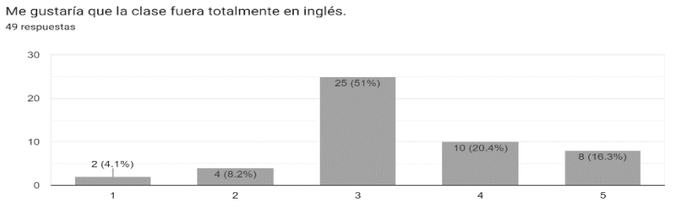


Figure 1. Statement 1: I would like for my class to be all in English.

The previous chart shows that there is a 51 % of the total of students who voted in a neutral position. They express that they do not have a problem if the class is all in English or not. Therefore, the students do not have a total negative attitude towards the language and are willing to try and understand the class if it was the case. Although half of the students reacted

towards a neutral position, there are more students that would like the class to be in English than those that definitely do not want to, which means that there are more students with a positive attitude than those with a negative attitude.

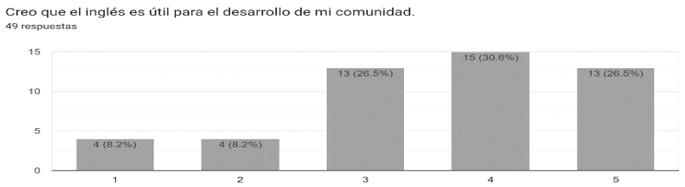


Figure 2. Statement 2: I think that English is useful for my community´s development.

The context of the students is rural, in this case there are comments from other community members that English is not so important, however, the aim of this question was to find out how much the students agree with these comments. According to the chart, there is a high 30 % of the students that agree that English is helpful for their community, and there is a balance between those who totally agree and those who are in a neutral position. Nevertheless, there is a greater percentage of those who agree than those who do not, having a balance between completely disagree and disagree with an 8.2 %.

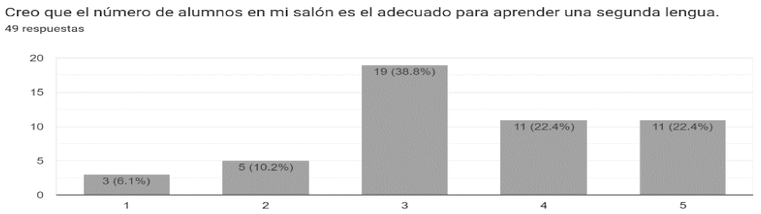


Figure 3. Statement 3: I think the number of students in my class is adequate to learn a second language.

Schools in rural areas are identified by having a big number of students, although this characteristic does not make it impossible to teach a second language, it surely makes it more difficult. As it can be seen in the last chart, 38.8 % of the students voted neutral and there is a balance between those who agree and totally agree with a 22.4 %. Most of the students have studied in the same community since elementary school, this means that they are used to having many students in a class, this is normal for them. None of the students have taken a class in private schools so, they do not have the experience of working with only 8 or 10 students in a classroom, if they had, then maybe they could analyze this question better.

Finally, students had to organize 10 statements being number 1 the one that they most agreed with and 10 the statement they least agreed with.

The statements were the next:

- English helps me get better opportunities for my

future.

- I enjoy learning English.
- I feel comfortable expressing myself in the class.
- I find learning English difficult.
- I am not interested in learning English.
- The English classes are interesting.
- I feel that my teacher supports me when I have doubts.
- The tools to learn and practice English are easy to find in my community.
- I practice English outside school, listening to music, watching movies, or playing video games.
- I have plans to travel to an English-speaking country.



Figure 4. Students answers to the statements: I´m not interested in learning English and English helps me get better opportunities for my future.

According to the graphs shown in Figure 4, the students most agreed with the statement since 23/49 students chose it as number 1 was, “I am not interested in learning English”.

The next statements with the highest vote of 20/49 students voting as the one they most agreed with were: “English helps me get better opportunities for my future”.

Therefore, the students are aware that English helps them with better opportunities for their future, however, they are simply not interested in learning English as a second language. In this case, regarding the three components of attitude that Getie (2020) states, students do not attend the affective component.

The statement “I feel that my teacher supports me when I have doubts” also had a high voting for what the students most agreed with, with 20/49 students voting number 1 like it is shown in Figure 5. However, 16 students voted as number 10, which means that there are many students that do not feel supported by the teacher in class, in fact this is where most of the students voted 10. As Forero-Rocha (2016) mentions, for the students to have a good attitude, the teacher should consider the students opinions. In this case, the graphs shows that the teacher does a good performance, however, she needs to work a more with those students that still do not feel attended.

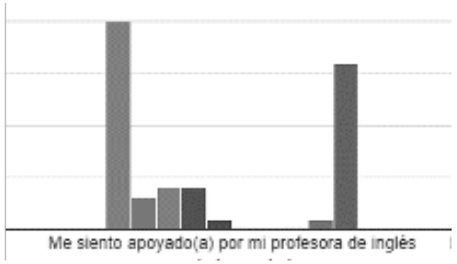


Figure 5. Students answers to the statement: I feel that my teacher supports me when I have doubts.

The statements: “I enjoy learning English”, “I feel comfortable expressing myself in the class”, and “the English classes are interesting” all have a very similar impact since 17 to 18 students voted as the statement they most agreed with. It can be deduced that the students have a positive attitude towards the English class since the teachers finds ways to keep them interested in the topics and creates a comfortable atmosphere for the students to express themselves, which adds to the statement that the teacher is promoting a respectful environment overall.

The statements where the context intervenes more are the statements: “The tools to learn and practice English are easy to find in my community” where 13 students voted 10, and “I practice English outside school, listening to music, watching movies, or playing video games” where 12 students voted 10, which can be seen in Figure 6. Since the community is small, not many tourists visit, therefore, the opportunity to practice with a native speaker is very low. In addition, there are no nearby places that provide them with this opportunity. Apart from this, students do not have access to internet in their homes, they sometimes have access to some social media like Facebook or Instagram, but they need to pay, when they do the telephone signal is not good enough.

This leads us to the second statement, since the students do not have it so easy with the tools they can use in their community, 12 of them totally do not search for any opportunity to practice outside the classroom. In this case, it can be seen that the learning experience that Dörnyei (2009) mentions seems to affect the students since the rural context in which they are learning makes it difficult to develop the learning process.

Nevertheless, for some, 13 students, this is no barrier, and they look for other ways to get some extra practice. Which refers to Getie´s (2020) behavioral component since some of the students do different actions outside classroom within their possibilities. If these students are consistent, they will have an advantage in acquiring the language.

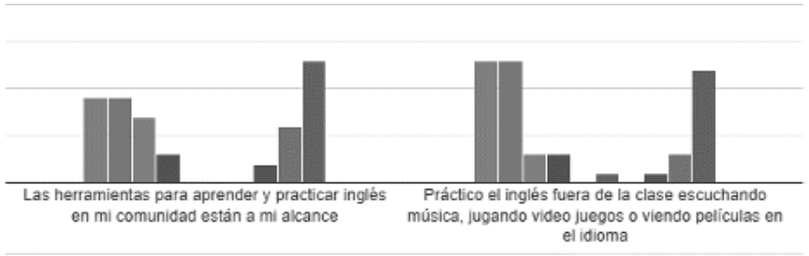


Figure 6. Students answers to the statement: The tools to learn and practice English are easy to find in my community and I practice English outside school, listening to music, watching movies, or playing video games.

As it can be seen in these graphs, the attitude of most of the students is not totally negative, however there is a lack of interest in learning the language. This cannot be attributed totally to the context they are immersed in; however, it is one of the factors that affects more.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this article, the term attitude and was discussed to understand the students´ attitude towards English as a second language. Of course, there are many factors that impact directly in the students´ attitude, however the teacher has one of the most important roles to help students.

Some of the students in their final comments support this idea, for example:

“Es una excelente materia me gusta mucho la miss es increíble”.

“Es muy divertido”.

“Es muy buena y entretenida la clase no hay ningún problema y 10 de 10”.

“Opinó que es una excelente materia y la miss es increíble nos apoya y nos resuelve las dudas”.

Therefore, context should not be a limitation for students to learn a second language. It is true that many times in rural contexts the tools are not in the best condition in the schools and many other times the tools available are not the best. However, the teacher should find a way to take the knowledge to the students using the resources they have.

In addition, a teacher should create a space where students feel free to participate and interact with the language. Most of the rural students are very shy and do not like speaking in their mother language, so it is even more difficult for them to do it in a second language. Therefore, teachers should try to understand the students background and try to help the students have a positive attitude towards the learning process instead of punishing them or obligating them to do a certain task. As it was discussed before, all students learn at their own pace and when they feel ready and comfortable, they will do it.

Adapting the class to the needs of students is a good

opportunity to have positive attitudes. This means adapting the tasks to their level, if the task is too difficult, then students feel confused and frustrated which will turn out to a negative attitude. Also, the tasks should be adapted to their needs, students should receive the knowledge thinking that it is useful for them. Finally, task should be adapted to the students' interests, like the music they like, artists, tv programmes, books, movies, or games to keep them interested in the classroom.

Finally, being immerse in a rural context does have an impact on some students, since they have a negative attitude towards learning a second language. This is because they do not see they can have an opportunity to learn it, and they are not interested. In this case, the teacher can apply the strategies above mentioned and the students may or may not do them, however, their attitude impacts on their learning process. In this case, students understand that English is important if they want better opportunities for their future, nonetheless, it was shown that some of them are not interested in learning. They see this opportunity to far from their possibilities and prefer not to worry about it.

Of course, teachers play an important role in the students learning process, but it must be understood that a teacher cannot face the issues of education alone. The student needs a context that helps them learn besides the teacher, which includes family, friends, neighbors, and the community where they live.

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Una aproximación a la historia del español de México

Ana Karen Flores Estrada

Resumen

El presente escrito es un acercamiento a la posible historia del desarrollo del español de México a partir de algunas posturas de filólogos, historiadores y sociolingüistas. Se analizan y resumen las etapas o periodos propuestos por los estudiosos en el tema para conocer el desarrollo del español de México en el territorio y su consolidación como lengua patrimonial desde la tercera década del siglo XVI hasta nuestros días.

Palabras clave: español mexicano, cronología, consolidación.

Abstract

This paper is an approach to the possible history of the development of Mexican Spanish based on the positions of philologists, historians and sociolinguists. The stages or periods proposed by scholars on the subject are analyzed and summarized in order to understand the development of Mexican Spanish in the territory and its consolidation as a heritage language, from the third decade of the 16th century to the present day.

Keywords: Mexican Spanish; chronology; consolidation.

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Sobre la historia del español de México

La llegada de los habitantes de la península ibérica al antiguo territorio mexicano, en 1519, (León, 1961) trajo consigo fuertes cambios en distintos ámbitos. El plano lingüístico es de los más importantes, ya que gracias a la lengua nos relacionamos y nombramos la realidad para dar sentido a las cosas, y, en un contexto en donde coexistían otros idiomas, la llegada de otra lengua vino a cambiar aquello que ya se conocía y a nombrar nuevas