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AFFECTIVE VARIABLES AND MOTIVATION AS PREDICTORS OF PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

English has become a key subject of educational systems worldwide. Thus, researchers have centered their attention on psychosocial processes that influence English proficiency in EFL settings. The aim of our study was to investigate the relation between affective variables, motivation and proficiency and assess which attitudinal/motivational domains can better predict English proficiency. Mini AMTB and English Proficiency test were employed to a sample of 354 university students. Our findings showed that students' achievement was significantly associated with their motivational intensity, their attitude towards learning English and their desire to learn it, as well as with their opinion of English native speakers and their perception of the quality of the English course. Secondly, instrumental orientation, motivational intensity, attitude towards learning English, and students' perception of the quality of the English course were found to be the predictors of achievement. Thus, creating a culturally enriching in-class environment based on student-centered strategies could impact on pupils' proficiency more than teachers' teaching abilities and in-class attitude.

KEYWORDS

AMTB, affective variables, English proficiency, learning attitude, L2 motivation, social-cognitive approach

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Highlights

- Instrumental and integrative motivations are not related with proficiency.
- Skills are linked with posture toward native speakers and perceived course quality.
- Extrinsic motivational regulation negatively predicts English abilities.
- Perception of the quality of English courses positively predicts proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Universities worldwide have been undergoing major changes, taking more proactive initiatives to include internationalization into their core missions and visions. Internationalization is a concept that describes the ways in which universities create partnerships, support international exchange of both their student and faculty, and promote linkages across foreign cultures and communities (Egron-Polak, 2012). In non-English speaking countries, these initiatives have mainly been associated with the increasing use of English as the main language of academia across a variety of fields such as research, technology, science, economy, etc. (González Ardeo, 2005). The desire to equip students with linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural skills and competencies that would ensure them better

competitiveness in the global market has led to numerous reforms and curricular changes (Amengual-Pizzaro, 2017; van Mulken and Hendricks, 2015). To increase students' academic, personal, and professional success and meet the set standards, many universities have included courses on English for Specific, Academic, and/or Occupational Purposes (ESP, EAP, EOP, respectively) to be part of the mandatory formal curriculum, as well as having English as the medium of instruction (Piller and Cho, 2013). In the light of these changes, studying the effect of affective variables on learning English as a foreign language (L2) is very essential, as motivation has been recognized as one of the most important determinants of L2 achievement and students' overall success (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003).

Over the past decades, the field of educational psychology has generated several leading theories that can be grouped into four distinct periods: the socio-psychological, the cognitive-situated, the process-oriented, and the socio-dynamic; each of them treating L2 motivational construct from a different perspective (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). Despite the use different conceptualizations, research has always reached the same conclusion that motivation and L2 achievement are positively correlated (e.g. Bernardo, Amerigo and García, 2014; Papi and Teimouri, 2014; Waninge, Dörnyei, and De Bot, 2014). For the purpose of our research, we have decided to use Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of language learning, due to the similarities our study context shares with the one of Gardner's study.

The Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (UANL) is located in the north of Mexico, in the city of Monterrey, which is considered as one of the wealthiest cities in Mexico with many significant international corporations. Due to its commercial profile, US expats, and the proximity to the US it is often referred to as the most "Americanized" city (Contreras, 2009). Although Monterrey is not a bilingual city, per se, it represents many bilingual opportunities for its citizens. In line with the UANL *Vision 2020* (UANL, 2011), The Faculty of Sports Organization (FOD) has supported changes to the current English language teaching in three consecutive phases: 1. Replacing general English courses for ESP, EOP, as well as offering EAP for both students and faculty; 2. Starting a bilingual undergraduate program; and 3. Creating a bilingual master's in the area of Physical Activity and Health. The reason for implementing ESP courses was twofold: to enhance students' professional skills and increase their employability in the private sector (e.g. bilingual schools, international companies, etc.), as well as to fight the decline of students' attendance of general English courses.

Theoretical Framework

L2 motivation represents a multifaceted psychological construct that fuels one's desire to learn a second language (Dörnyei, 2005). It is a combination of both internal and external forces that drives individuals to put effort, desire, and a positive attitude into the process of learning (Gardner, 2006). Learners who lack the mentioned forces cannot be considered as motivated. In fact, Spolsky (1990) and Gardner (2006) similarly claim that higher motivated learners are more likely to learn faster and achieve better learning results. However, this would not be possible without the learners having a favorable attitude towards L2 learning. In this vein, research confirms the high inter-relatedness of attitudes and motivation as two key variables in L2 learning (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Bernaus et al., 2004). The Socio-Educational Model (Gardner, 1985, 2010) has long been used as one of the leading theoretical foundations in L2 learning motivation applied to EFL contexts; ESP in particular (Khodadad and Kaur, 2016). Language acquisition contexts, individual difference variables, antecedent factors, and outcomes are four tenet areas that underpin this model, explaining the interplay of language learning, culture- and L2-related attitudes, and the learning situation. This model further asserts that language acquisition is dependent on the operation of individual variables such as language ability, strategies, intelligence, L2 motivation or language anxiety.

Authors have recognized two main components of motivation towards L2 learning: integrative and instrumental (Carrio-Pastor and Mestre, 2014; Gardner, 2010; Quan, 2014). Integrative motivation reflects the will and eagerness to integrate oneself into a community in which a different language is spoken. It also describes the wish to communicate with people within a different community, as well as the interest and positive attitude towards them. Furthermore, it is also characterized by the positive attitudes that learners hold towards any aspect of the teaching-learning context (Gardner, 1985, 2010). According to Gardner (2010), integrativeness refers to the extent of one's interest to get involved and identify oneself with the L2 community. Johnson (2001) and Saville-Troike (2006) see instrumental motivation from a purely practical point of view, naming increased professional opportunities, better socioeconomic condition, accessing scientific/technical literature, or successfully completing a school test or course. Their definition seems to be particularly fitting to contexts, where knowing English as a foreign/second language, may improve one's social and professional status.

Over the decades, the language-learning literature has generated various definitions and stances on the term attitude. Attitudes can be described as a cognitive disposition that determines one's behavior that provokes both favorable and unfavorable reactions towards a variety of psychological objects such as person, symbol, idea, phrase, etc. (Kiesler, Nisbett, & Zanna, 1969; Edwards, 1994). They are believed to constitute of three components – cognitive, affective and conative – which can be further analyzed according to a variety of traits (Scott, 1968). As Shaw and Wright (1967) and Lemon (1973) state, attitudes represent a system of learned evaluative and affective reactions that are dynamically interrelated with the environment and thus might be shaped and/or changed by further learning. In the language context, attitudes are understood as input-based cognitive reflections of attitudes that L2 learners hold towards a language and its speakers. Gardner (1985) hypothesizes that learners' attitude towards a target language community is positively correlated with the pace and time needed for acquiring such language. In similar vein, Crystal (2010) agrees that the degree of perception of a country or culture is highly associated with language learning achievement. These assumptions stem from Gardner's theory that beyond the traditional classroom-based linguistic outputs, students are also acquiring both cultural and social skills and behaviors that are typical of the target culture. Thus, not having favorable attitudes may hinder students' learning potential.

Although both terms represent distinct factors that play an important role in second language learning, there is no doubt that they are highly interrelated, as there cannot be favorable attitudes without having a positive energy to sustain them, as well as there cannot be positive behavior without a proper mind set. Owing to that, different approaches and instruments were used to determine what motivates language learners towards learning EFL, focusing on motivation in general (Iwaniec, 2014), learning motivation (Xu and Gao, 2014), anxiety, attitude and motivation (e.g. Bernaus and

Gardner, 2008; Jain and Sidhu, 2013; Cheng et al., 2014), or integrative and instrumental aspects of motivation (Samad, Etemadzadeh and Far, 2012; Feng and Fan, 2012). Yet, to our knowledge, very few studies have focused on the relation between affective variables and language proficiency. A recent study by Alrabai and Moskovsky (2016) demonstrated that motivation, attitude, anxiety, self-esteem and autonomy play an important role in L2 achievement. For their sample, motivation accounted for the highest variance in achievement. Unlike in other studies (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, 2010), anxiety was found to have the least predictive capacity towards L2 acquisition in general, and achievement in particular. When studying different types of motivation, Cheng et al. (2014) found that the higher intrinsic motivation, the better students perform at English tests. On the contrary, the higher instrumental motivation, the lower test scores. As indicated in Bernaus and Gardner (2008), motivation – namely integration, attitudes towards the learning situation, and instrumental orientation – was found to be a positive predictor of English achievement. On the other hand, attitude towards the learning situation and language anxiety were found to be negative predictors of English achievement. In a similar vein, Khodadad and Kaur (2016) corroborated that the effect of motivation on EFL achievement was significantly greater when affected by attitudes towards the learning situation, integrativeness, and self-efficacy. The results from Jain and Sidhu (2013) showed that students were highly motivated and had a positive attitude towards studying English as a second language. Despite high level of anxiety, low proficiency students had higher and significant relationship in attitude and motivation than their high proficiency peers. As cited in Thang, Ting and Nurjanah (2011), these results were found to be in contrast with previous studies that demonstrated that low-achievers are likely to be reluctant in studying English and consequently they commonly obtain lower proficiency scores. Another study revealed that integrative motivation and English skills are positively correlated (Samad, Etemadzadeh and Far, 2012). In opposition with these outcomes, a study carried out by Sandoval Pineda (2011) with Mexican university students showed that different proficiency scores did not depend on the intensity and type of motivation, nor on the attitude that students had towards English speakers and Anglophone culture. However, the instrument used by this author was not fully reliable for the Mexican environment. A recent study by Cocca et al. (2017) demonstrated that changes were needed in order to achieve internal and structural validity.

Given the crucial role learning English plays in both academic and professional contexts and the changes to English programs at FOD, it is important to understand student's motivation, attitude and affective variables towards L2 learning and proficiency. Secondly, although there are a few studies that have investigated the relation between the different constructs of motivation and English proficiency, this particular field of interest seems to be the least researched. Therefore, more research is required to delve into the processes that regulate individuals' motivation towards L2 learning and its impact on their English skills proficiency. Thus, the objective of the article is to analyze the relationship between affective variables,

motivation, and EFL proficiency level. For this purpose, this article addresses the following research questions:

- Is there a correlation between motivational domains and EFL proficiency in university students?
- Which motivational domains can better predict successful development of skills in EFL?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and Sample

The study is based on a correlational and observational approach. The design is non-experimental as no variable was manipulated and the sample was composed of natural groups. The population of this study was represented by university students coursing from second to sixth semester at the Faculty of Sports Organization (FOD) of the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (UANL) and officially enrolled in the English courses. We decided to exclude first-semester students as they had not yet participated in the English courses offered by FOD and, therefore, their answers regarding teacher/course evaluation could have been affected by prior experience with language courses attended during their previous studies. In addition, all English courses at FOD conclude after sixth semester, consequently students enrolled in seventh, eight, or ninth semester were also excluded. A total of 1,496 individuals matched the above-mentioned inclusion criteria. The sample size, calculated with confidence level of 95% and relative standard error of 2.17%, was set at 354 participants, who were selected using a combination of two sampling techniques. Firstly, we employed a sampling technique based on stratification and proportional affixation in order to maintain representative proportions of students based on gender and semester. As a result, the final sample was constituted by 266 men and 88 women enrolled in the bachelor program at FOD in Fall 2017, as shown in table 1. Secondly, non-probabilistic sampling based on convenience was applied to reach the minimum number of participants.

Semester	Gender	<i>n</i>	Age
Second	Men	98	18.57 ± 0.828
	Women	13	18.53 ± 0.710
Third	Men	65	18.96 ± 0.994
	Women	18	18.88 ± 0.865
Forth	Men	48	19.05 ± 0.982
	Women	15	19.03 ± 1.203
Fifth	Men	27	19.34 ± 2.296
	Women	31	19.08 ± 2.321
Sixth	Men	28	19.57 ± 2.124
	Women	11	19.43 ± 2.138
Overall	Men	266	19.09 ± 2.321
	Women	88	18.99 ± 2.124
	Total	354	19.04 ± 3.546

Table 1: Descriptive information of the sample by semester and gender, 2016-2017

Instruments

Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. A previously adapted and validated Mexican version of mini-Attitude/Motivation Test Battery ([S-AMTB], Cocca et al., 2017) was used. This version is composed by 43 items distributed into nine dimensions: (1) interest towards learning languages; (2) intensity of motivation; (3) evaluation of English teachers; (4) attitude towards learning English; (5) attitude towards English speakers; (6) integrative orientation; (7) will to learn English; (8) evaluation of the English course; and (9) instrumental orientation. The instrument is based on a Likert-type scale from total disagreement (1) to total agreement (7). This questionnaire measures different aspects of motivation towards learning L2, with the main focus on English as a second language. S-AMTB used in this study sample showed high results both for reliability ($\alpha = .985$) and structural validity ($\chi^2/df = 1.7$; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = 0.055; Non-Formed Fit Index = .988; Comparative Fit Index = .989).

Placement Test. A placement test from Oxford University Press was used to determine students' English proficiency. Oxford placement tests are calibrated against the majority of international language examinations and are considered a reliable source of English learners' levels worldwide. The test applied in this research was provided together with text books *Solutions* used in English courses at FOD (Falla and Davies, 2013). It focuses on elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate levels. The exam was created by experts from Oxford University in accordance with teaching-learning processes, strategies, and contents presented in *Solutions* text book (Edwards, 2007). Considering that all participants in our study used this text book, selecting the correspondent placement test was a necessary measure. This test consisted of four parts: (1) Grammar and Vocabulary; (2) Reading; (3) Listening; and (4) Writing. The highest possible score was 90 points (pts): 50pts, 10pts, 20pts, and 10pts for each one of the parts, respectively. Based on the scores obtained, students were then divided into three proficiency levels: (1) elementary (0-38pts); (2) Pre-intermediate (39-61pts); and (3) Intermediate (62-90pts).

As a requirement for studying at FOD, at the beginning and at the end of each semester, students must take an English placement test. The placement test is usually carried out at FOD facilities. The day of the final exam, in the last week of the semester, students included in the sample were called to answer the S-AMTB questionnaire before taking the placement test. This sequence was established because coping with the exam could have had a negative impact on participants' momentary attitude towards English.

Data analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, descriptive and frequency analyses were run in order to detect any possible mistake during the process of data transfer. Successively, a study of outliers was carried out using the standardized scores and Mahalanobis D^2 techniques. Once the data set was ready for analysis, we run correlation analyses and multiple linear regressions (MLR)

using the enter method. In addition, collinearity diagnostic, casewise and Durbin-Watson tests, Cook's distances and Leverage points were evaluated to confirm the validity of the model. Moreover, scatterplots were analyzed in order to confirm linear relationships between the independent and dependent variables included in this research.

RESULTS

Results of English proficiency showed that 155 students (43.8% of the sample) were found to have elementary level, 107 students (30.2%) obtained pre-intermediate scores, and 92 students (26.0%) achieved intermediate English level. Average proficiency score was set at 32.31 (SD = 13.60). Descriptive results for the dimensions of the S-AMTB questionnaire are shown in table 2.

AMTB dimensions	Mean	SD
Interest towards learning languages	5.75	0.99
Intensity of motivation	5.60	0.98
Evaluation of English teachers	5.07	0.95
Attitude towards learning English	5.77	1.02
Attitude towards English speakers	5.30	1.19
Integrative orientation	5.88	1.02
Will to learn English	5.69	0.99
Evaluation of the English course	5.19	1.28
Instrumental orientation	5.71	0.96

Table 2: Descriptive results from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), 2016-2017

Proficiency scores were found to be significantly correlated with the intensity of students' motivation towards L2, students' attitude towards learning English, students' opinion of English speakers, their desire to learn English, and their evaluation of the English course quality. No relation was found between proficiency and participants' interest towards learning languages, their evaluation of English teachers, integrative or instrumental orientation. Detailed outcomes are shown in table 3.

Tests were run for assessing the validity of MLR. The first diagnostic analysis revealed the presence of five outliers due to high leverage (> 1.234); three outliers due to high values of Cook's distance (> 1.1); one outlier due to high residual's size (> 3.34); and five outliers due to a combination of high leverage and Cook's distance. After we dropped these 14 cases, the diagnostic analysis demonstrated high reliability for the model. Independence of residuals was confirmed by Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.706. Normal distribution of residuals was examined by means of histogram and P-P plot. Linear relationships and homoscedasticity were checked inspecting scatterplots and partial regression plots. No correlations between variables included in the model had high coefficient ($r < \pm .489$), as well as values for tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) were good for the model (tolerance $> .275$; VIF < 4.569), rejecting possible multicollinearities. Presence of further outliers was discarded by running case-wise diagnostics of standardized residuals ($-1.83 < SR < 2.36$), leverage points (Leverage $< .086$) and influential points (Cook's distance $< .051$).

S-AMTB dimensions	Coefficient	p
Interest towards learning languages	.064	.230
Intensity of motivation	.210	.001**
Evaluation of English teachers	.102	.056
Attitude towards learning English	.212	.001**
Attitude towards English speakers	.136	.010*
Integrative orientation	.104	.051
Will to learn English	.148	.005**
Evaluation of the English course	.134	.012*
Instrumental orientation	.036	.499

Table 3: Correlations between mini-Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (S-AMTB) dimensions and proficiency scores, 2016-2017

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Variable	B	SE _B	β
Intercept	27.540	5.421	
Interest towards learning languages	2.277	1.276	.149
Intensity of motivation	3.547	1.801	.234*
Evaluation of English teachers	2.667	1.459	.178
Attitude towards learning English	3.827	1.832	.251*
Attitude towards English speakers	1.572	1.246	.126
Integrative orientation	.156	1.879	.010
Will to learn English	1.579	1.771	.102
Evaluation of the English course	4.204	1.672	.276*
Instrumental orientation	-5.360	1.580	-.331**

Table 4: Summary of the model predicting English proficiency, 2016-2017

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE_B = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient

The model was statistically significant for predicting English proficiency ($F_{9,330} = 5.813, p < .001, R^2 = .437$). Effect size was calculated by means of Cohen's f^2 ($f^2 = .776$). The variables: intensity of motivation, attitude towards learning English, evaluation of the English course, and instrumental orientation added statistical significance to the prediction ($p < .05$). Interest towards learning English, evaluation of English teachers, attitude towards English speakers, integrative orientation, and will to learn English did not fit significantly into the final model. Regression coefficients and standard errors are shown in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to assess correlations between different dimensions of affective variables and motivation and young adults' English proficiency in the Mexican setting; and to appraise the reliability of a prediction model in order to establish which dimensions of these constructs might estimate the development of English language skills.

The study of the interaction between a complex construct such as attitudes and motivation, and the proneness to learning a foreign language, as well as the development of communicative skills, has given contradictory results. Our outcomes showed that English proficiency is highly correlated with the intensity of students' motivation, the attitude that students have towards learning this language, and their will to learn it. As Zarrinabadi (2014) confirms, overall motivation and desire to learn a language are strongly

related with higher knowledge and communicative skills. Also, we found significant correlations of English skills with students' motivation originated from the quality of the English course they are enrolled in. In line with our findings, Bernaus and Gardner (2008) found out that the characteristics of an English course, regardless of teachers' abilities and empathy, may affect individuals' attitude towards learning, as well as the development of L2 skills. Similar to our results, authors have stressed the importance of individuals' attitude towards the course, towards learning languages, and towards English specifically, as the main correlates of the development of abilities in EFL learning (Bur, Haas and Ferriere, 2015). This is an interesting result as it puts the emphasis on the need for properly planning course curricula and creating attractive activities over teachers' teaching ability, or their emotional connection with students. It is to say that although teachers' attitude can foster pupils' willingness to enroll in a course or to use L2 to communicate, this does not always directly imply high development of skills (Byun, 2013; Zarrinabadi, 2014). Even though building an English course in accordance with the needs of a specific population of students can support their knowledge and abilities (Greenfader, Brouillette and Farkas, 2015; Stanat et al., 2012), lack of planning and inappropriate teaching strategies can cause a drop in L2 proficiency (Bouazid and Le Roux, 2014). In the same vein, Jodaei et al. (2018) discovered that despite of high initial motivation, students demonstrated a great motivational decline by the end of an English course, finding that situation-specific factors (e.g. management issues, timing, planning, assessment, facilities)

played a significant role. In conclusion, planning courses and activities that students perceive as interesting and stimulating appears to play an important role in predicting the development of English skills, regardless of teachers' teaching abilities or empathy with their students (Masrom, Alwi and Daud, 2015). At the same time, teaching materials and methodology has been recognized as one of the key factors for success in ESP courses (González Ardeo, 2016), suggesting cooperative learning and similar strategies as means to enhance proficiency (Azizinezhad, Hashemi and Darvishi, 2013).

Another interesting finding of our research was the positive correlation between English skills and students' attitude towards English native speakers. This particular result can be explained by the geographical proximity between Mexico and the United States and its influence on Mexican culture and economy. On the other hand, if the features of a certain society do not match with students' beliefs, proficiency may be negatively affected (Jiang and Zheng, 2013). Our findings appear to be in contrast with additional research supporting an antithetical theory. Jain and Sidhu (2013) affirm that motivation towards L2 is an independent element of the process of learning, which does not necessarily relate with individuals' abilities. This statement is supported by findings in different contexts, highlighting that motivation can be linked with engagement in L2 courses, but not with final proficiency (Alavi and Abbasnia, 2014; Fahim and Bagheri, 2012). However, we need to consider that our results showed no correlation of proficiency with certain domains of motivation such as attitude towards English teachers' ability, interest towards learning foreign languages, and motivational intensity. This confirms previous findings from other studies, pointing out that students' motivation originated by teachers' ability may reinforce participation, but not proficiency (Bernaus and Gardner, 2008; Luong-Phan and Effenev, 2015). Similarly, MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) added that students' efficacy in L2 is not associated with their attitude towards the specific language, their interest and desire to learn it, or their motivational intensity. Our results showed that the most impacting predictor of English level in our sample was instrumental orientation. Nonetheless, in our model, proficiency is higher when students obtain lower scores of this variable, due to a negative relation underlined by the prediction coefficient (-5.360). According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), instrumental orientation identifies the extrinsic motivation towards learning English, i.e. how this language can help individuals improve their lives in a practical way such as higher social consideration, better jobs, increased wages, etc. As expected, in line with the main theories on motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2008), the presence of external reinforcements, either reward or punishment, affects negatively learning autonomy and commonly reduces the chances of success. Most of the students at FOD have part-time jobs to support their families or to pay their tuition, or they need extra credits in order to hold their scholarships. In accordance with the model found in this study and considering that the average proficiency for our sample was set at the score of 32.31 (low, elementary level), it is possible that many of the participants attend the English courses only to pursue better job conditions or more credits, both representing factors of an instrumental orientation of motivation. In accordance with the main social-

cognitive theories on motivation, instrumental motivation represents a strong negative predictor of success in studying foreign languages. As a consequence, even though students may enroll in an English course to seek external goals, language school managers and English teachers should plan strategies and activities that awaken pupils' interest towards English culture and English native speakers. In this sense, in- and out-of-class foreign culture promotion may prompt students' attention and stimulate them to learn English for more intrinsic purposes (Macianskiene and Bijeikiene, 2013).

Furthermore, our model showed that motivational intensity, attitude towards learning English, and perceived quality of the English course represent positive predictors of proficiency, though less significant than instrumental motivation. These outcomes are in line with the model proposed by Bernaus and Gardner (2008), in which integrative and instrumental orientation, as well as attitude towards the English course, were the strongest antecedents of achievement in L2. Karlak and Velki (2015) proposed a prediction model based on language characteristics motivation and learner characteristics motivation as the main predictors of success. However, they explain that the former refers to the value that students assign to L2, either instrumental or integrative; whereas the latter refers to self-confidence and students' attitude towards learning L2. In addition, learning context motivation, which describes perceived teaching style and course structure and methodology, also significantly summed to the model. This pattern is comparable to our findings, as well as to those from other research (Gardner, 2010; McEown, Noels and Saumure, 2014). Although it is important to respect academic freedom with respect to teaching and course planning, i.e. placing on the instructors the responsibility of selecting materials, defining course content and determining evaluation methods, this individualistic approach might, especially in language teaching, lead to the discontinuity and significant differences in course delivery. Thus, teachers (tenured, instructors, adjuncts, remote, etc.) contributing to EFL programs should work collaboratively on planning and design; making sure that programs are structured and aligned to standards both vertically and horizontally.

CONCLUSIONS

Although there exist many factors indicating students' success in using L2, proficiency represents the most important sign of well-developed L2 skills and knowledge, as well as it indicates higher chances of success for individuals living in foreign countries (Daller and Phelan, 2013). It is known that motivation towards learning L2 is an important factor for engaging in L2 courses as well as for avoiding burn-out and consequently participation drop-out. However, its direct relation with students' achievement in L2 is still under discussion, since research has revealed contradictory results. In spite of the sample limitation in terms of a fixed environment, our study supports the hypothesis that motivation influences EFL proficiency. Yet, our findings underline the need of investigating the different domains of this psychological construct separately, as they can affect students' engagement and success in EFL depending on social, cultural and even geographical aspects. Moreover, lesson planning

with student-centered tasks as well as cultural awareness and promotion seem to play a key role in increasing students' L2 motivation and proficiency. Thus, teachers could plan lessons/activities using strategies such as cooperative, inquiry, and/or project-based learning, content-based instruction, or scenario-based classroom that are recognized to support students' personal, social, cognitive, and emotional growth. Furthermore, using technology and digital resources will allow students to explore, experiment and interact with the target culture (Dema and Moeller, 2012).

In the future, we suggest increasing sample size in order to analyze the variance of different motivational domains depending on gender, age, but also enrollment in English courses organized by other institutions or language schools. Nourinezhad, Kargar and Rostampour (2015) comment that the relation between motivation and students' achievement may change at the beginning, middle, and at the end of a proposed course. Therefore, it would be interesting to propose longitudinal studies in order to understand how motivation and proficiency change and relate to each other in the course of time.

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