

ANALYSIS OF LEARNERS' NEEDS IN THE SPANISH VOCATIONAL TRAINING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to analyse the linguistic needs of students doing a middle vocational training cycle in administration. In Spain, English is a compulsory language subject from the age of 6, signifying that those finishing secondary school level will have taken English lessons 2–4 times a week for approximately 10 years. However, the English levels in Spain are frequently disputed. In order to expose legitimate language levels and assess factors influencing English language education in Spain, a study was carried out involving language assessment and a survey. To complete this study, 55 students from a middle vocational training cycle in administration were recorded having a 5-minute conversation in English with a native English speaker. To analyse the language abilities of these students, an evaluation rubric was used, categorising pupils into three different levels of English communication based on expression and comprehension. And we found that a small percentage of pupils achieved the highest communication level whilst, on the contrary, half of them achieved a basic English communication level.

Keywords: English language; language acquisition; learner's needs; Vocational Education

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kebutuhan linguistik siswa yang melakukan siklus pelatihan kejuruan menengah dalam administrasi. Di Spanyol, bahasa Inggris adalah mata pelajaran bahasa wajib sejak usia 6 tahun, yang menandakan bahwa mereka yang menyelesaikan tingkat sekolah menengah akan mengambil pelajaran bahasa Inggris 2–4 kali seminggu selama kurang lebih 10 tahun. Namun, tingkat bahasa Inggris di Spanyol sering diperdebatkan. Untuk mengungkap tingkat bahasa yang sah dan menilai faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pendidikan bahasa Inggris di Spanyol, sebuah penelitian dilakukan yang melibatkan penilaian bahasa dengan menggunakan survei. Untuk melengkapi penelitian ini, 55 siswa dari siklus pelatihan kejuruan menengah di bidang administrasi direkam melakukan percakapan 5 menit dalam bahasa Inggris dengan penutur asli bahasa Inggris. Untuk menganalisis kemampuan bahasa siswa ini, rubrik evaluasi digunakan, mengkategorikan siswa ke dalam tiga tingkat komunikasi bahasa Inggris yang berbeda berdasarkan ekspresi dan pemahaman. Kami menemukan bahwa sebagian kecil siswa mencapai tingkat komunikasi tertinggi sementara, sebaliknya, setengah dari mereka mencapai tingkat komunikasi bahasa Inggris dasar.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris; pemerolehan bahasa; kebutuhan siswa; pendidikan vokasi

INTRODUCTION

The use of English in Europe, including in Spain, is an omnipresent communication method that has been facilitated due to globalisation and international trade, as well as political, technological and cultural dominance from

countries such as the US (García, 2013). Therefore, the importance of English as a lingua franca and its incorporation in our education system is undeniable.

Spain introduces English as a compulsory subject at the age of 6 in primary school; one of the earliest educational stages of English language teaching in Europe (Caraker, 2016).

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However, Spain is often criticised for its poor English language levels and teaching, to the extent that it is labelled with a low level of English. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to be exposed to the stigma of embarrassment, shame and lack of confidence in English language capacities on a personal and national level. Many students report feeling embarrassed of their English (Kocaman, 2017) and in the European Commission Special Eurobarometer 386 in 2012, 78% of Spanish citizens were reported to feel unable to engage in an English conversation confidently compared to figures of a mere 10% in the Netherlands and 14% in Denmark and Sweden. It should be noted that feelings of embarrassment or self-consciousness can be grouped with similar socio-emotional variables under shame linked to language learning (Galmiche, 2018).

Moreover, many secondary pupils attend an extracurricular English school to help improve their English in order to achieve official certificates or to pass exams at school. In 2014, the *Vanguardia* published that up to 44% of Spanish students take private classes to receive an extra form of learning support in addition to their school, college or university education. This figure was the second-highest when compared amongst European countries. Hence, the Spanish level of English is questionable when considering the extra measures that are taken in order to teach English as a foreign language.

To investigate English proficiency levels and factors surrounding the topic of English language teaching in vocational education, a study was carried out in which 55 students from a middle vocational cycle in Administration will take part. The main objectives of the study are to explore the socio-emotional ties related to language learning and speaking English, and the factors that contribute to a positive, or negative, language learning experience.

The investigation was completed during the first term in which 55 pupils from the vocational school took part in a short conversation in English with a native speaker. In conjunction with the conversation which

was recorded in audio format, all the students were asked the same questions in a short survey with regards to their own individual English language learning experience.

Once the results have been collected and the conversations have been evaluated using a rubric, an analysis of the learners' needs and their language acquisition process can be made. This information also enabled us to confirm the students' personal security in terms of confidence and expression ability when speaking English. Moreover, an indication of language levels and educational productivity was also given using the data collected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the effort made by the government in ensuring the provision of more language classes, assistants and qualified teachers, the levels still remain low, especially when compared to other European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany or Romania. It is indeed impossible to pinpoint the underlying cause of the controversial level of English language in Spain, given that it is dependent on variants such as culture, language exposure, teaching resources and methodologies, teacher training but also further ingrained factors such as language roots (Martín, 2000 and Pastor, 2004).

Prior to carrying out the study and collecting data, it is first necessary to understand English language education in Spain. While European countries are likely to share system similarities, many have a varied English language system and norms for teaching English in schools. In order to analyse English language education in Spain, a thorough analysis of the language system was made, taking into account teaching approaches, resources and materials. Furthermore, Spain has differing laws and legislations due to its autonomous communities that govern the school system, giving certain authority to different bodies such as the Ministry of Education, the regional government, the school or the teacher.

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The English Language System in Spain

English is taught from the age of 6 in Spanish schools. However, some schools also choose to introduce English at a younger age from 3–6 years old. Whilst age is an important factor when analysing child language acquisition, it is also fundamental to take into account teaching approaches, as well as classroom resources used to reinforce language learning. As previously mentioned, the English language learning in Spain is often ranked lowly on a European level (Eurostat, 2013).

Traditionally, teaching methods such as the GTM (the Grammar Translation Method) were used in English language education. After the implementation of the General Law of Education in 1970, when foreign language teaching was implemented in Spain initially, the Audiolingual Method and the Audiovisual Method were the defining methods in primary education (Criado & Sánchez, 2009). The then-adopted Audiolingual Method for language teaching received criticism and became a less used teaching method and instead, the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT) in conjunction with a newfound attention to the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) were used as principles in foreign language teaching (Criado & Sánchez, 2009).

Although in recent years, methodologies have seen a shift with more teachers implementing the communicative approach, centres are implementing CLIL education as well as other teaching methods and methodologies such as the Total Physical Response. Rica-Peromingo (2009) insists that although the communicative methodology is widely used in education in Spain, it is not usual to have frequent contact with a native English speaker.

In terms of teaching resources, the majority of classes are taught with a textbook in which listening, writing, reading and speaking activities are completed. Regardless of the new tools, programmes and devices that come hand in hand with technological

advances, more modern resources are used less in comparison with textbook materials (Rica-Peromingo, 2009). While Behnke (2018) considers that a key factor in language learning is reading comprehension due to the construction of knowledge through language, Aguilera Flage (2015) insists that textbooks are amongst one of the least valued resources.

Language progress in school is monitored and evaluated using exams, namely testing competency in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Despite the equal importance of these four language skills, university entrance exams give much more emphasis on writing skills (Rica-Peromingo, 2009). Hence, it could be concluded that given that writing skills are a top priority for university admission, Vocational Education, focuses on grammar, spelling, reading and writing skills as opposed to listening and speaking.

It could also be argued that the resources used in class are entirely dependent on how they are used and how information is explained, conveyed and taught by teachers. The aforementioned language system factors are crucial when investigating learners' needs and language acquisition process.

Data Regarding English Language Levels in Spain

Having revised English language education on a national perspective within the Spanish state, data regarding English language levels in Spain on a global perspective were analysed in order to gauge English language teaching in Spain in a wider context. According to the EF EPI (Education First English Proficiency Index) in 2018, Spain, France and Italy were pinpointed as amongst those with persistent deficiencies in English language abilities. In more recent reports issued by EF, France has been able to make notable progress while Spain and Italy have not (Education First, 2019 & 2020). Furthermore, Spain is currently the lowest-ranked EU country out of all 100 countries, listed at 34 under the moderate proficiency division (Education First, 2020).

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Spain began participating in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) reports in 2000 but continues to score lower than average routinely (OECD, 2012). While the main focus of PISA reports are Science and Mathematics, there is significant data on reading. In 2015, Spain attained 3 percentage points less than it did in the 2009 report, resulting in a decrease in literacy education. (OECD, 2015).

As previously mentioned, 78% of Spanish citizens are unconfident in engaging in English conversation, whereas in other European countries such as the Netherlands, the figure was a mere 10%. In Denmark and Sweden, 14% felt unconfident in speaking English (European Commission, 2012). It is therefore evident that Spain not only lags in terms of linguistic ability, but also in terms of self-esteem and confidence when speaking English. This could indeed be correlated with language ability; however, there are other factors to consider such as socio-cultural variables including esteem, societal values and views of foreign languages or teaching, as well as the education system.

HYPOTHESIS

Speaking Analysis

Before undergoing this study, research has proven that English language levels were low, both from studying data such as the EF EPI and PISA reports, but also from talking to the general public in Spain, as well as teaching the English language during the last years. Although children learn English from age 6, many towards their last years of secondary school education cannot understand or answer basic questions such as, “how was your day?” or “what did you do yesterday?”. Therefore, a rough estimation was made hypothesising a small percentage of pupils would have difficulties communicating their ideas with sufficient vocabulary or grammatical structures. This was primarily drawn from an estimation of language ability at Year 6 primary school level and the progress that was

made within 4 years of studying at secondary school at least.

A factor that consistently seems to be present among the topic of English language levels or English speaking is the socio-emotional ties of embarrassment and prejudice which seem to be holding back a wealth of pupils on a day-to-day basis in class. It became evident early on that those with an above-average level of English language do not seem to fall into this category as often. In fact, most English language learners with a good level of English have an air of tranquillity or confidence amongst them due to their strong ability to converse and understand the language. Hence, it was hypothesised that those with a good level of language comprehension and expression would not fall into the lower band of, “does not feel confident or able to express themselves in English” in the expression section of the evaluation rubric.

However, prior to collecting data, an accurate prediction was not able to be made as to the percentage of students who would feel uncomfortable or unconfident in their English expression. Nevertheless, an approximation was made that between 20–50% of pupils would either feel uncomfortable speaking English or be evaluated in the lowest band of expression during data collection.

Survey Questions

Naturally, there are several survey questions where a hypothesis is both irrelevant and impossible to make, given that the principle is to gauge on personal experience which varies from pupil to pupil and depends on several factors such as cultural background, personal opportunities outside of school, private education, etc. Therefore, a general hypothesis was not made regarding the survey part of the study.

However, there were some predictions that were made on certain survey questions such as question 9: “When you are given opportunities to speak English in class, do you actually speak English?”. This question deliberately followed question 8 to aid reflection in contradiction as upon starting the

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placement during observation, it was noted that many students talk back to the English teacher in Spanish as opposed to English.

A small hypothesis was also made regarding survey question 4, "Have you ever been on an exchange or holiday in an English-speaking country?". Therefore, a prediction was made that a small percentage of pupils would have been on an exchange or holiday in an English-speaking country, particularly for a prolonged period.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to collect data for this study consisted of recording a 5-

minute conversation in audio format and evaluating the expression and comprehension of students using a rubric. The rubric aimed to allocate students on a language communication scale based on expression and comprehension without labelling them numerically. Instead, students were able to achieve a level of language expression and comprehension. Following the conversation, a survey was taken in order to correlate evaluation results with survey information accordingly, to analyse learners' needs as well as English language education experience both in and out of school.

Table 5. Evaluation Rubric

	<i>Expressive and Comprehensive English Communication</i>	<i>Basic English communication</i>	<i>Lack of English comprehension and expression</i>
Expression	Feels confident and able to express themselves in English.	Feels fairly confident and only has minor difficulties expressing themselves in English.	Does not feel confident or able to express themselves in English.
Comprehension	Never or rarely asks for the question to be repeated.	Asks for the question to be repeated occasionally.	Almost always or always asks for the question to be repeated.
Vocabulary use	Uses extensive, advanced vocabulary to communicate and express themselves.	Uses simple vocabulary to communicate and express themselves.	Lacks vocabulary to be able to communicate and express themselves.
Syntax	Makes few or no syntax mistakes.	Makes some syntax mistakes occasionally.	Finds it difficult to order words or consistently makes syntax mistakes.
Grammar	Uses a variety of grammatical tenses correctly.	Uses some grammatical tenses correctly.	Is unable to communicate using different grammatical tenses.
Pronunciation	Pronounces most or all words at a comprehensible level.	Pronounces many words at a comprehensible level but finds pronunciation slightly difficult.	Is unable to pronounce many words at a comprehensible level.

Source: Own Elaboration

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Investigation Process

The main part of the investigation was the conversation of up to 5 minutes with a native English speaker from the UK. It should be noted that the UK dialect of the native speaker is considered to be standard English and the accent fluctuates between RP and Estuary, often linked to South English accent variants.

There was no time limit given to students, as the main objective was to talk about the topics in the conversation dialogue planned for the study without creating an overexaggerated exam environment. The main concerns as to creating a minimum or maximum time limit were that they would shape the conversation in an unnatural way, given that when we talk on a day-to-day basis habitually, we are unaware of the time or minutes we spend talking about a certain topic. Therefore, no minimum or maximum time limit was given. Instead, the conversation dialogue aimed to guide the conversation in a more natural way yet enabled symmetry to be kept between all conversations.

After having finished the conversation and audio recording, pupils were asked a series of questions in a survey to further understand their English language education. This survey information could then be correlated with the results of their language expression and comprehension level to investigate the extent to which pupils study English in order to achieve certain language levels.

The survey did not aim to analyse pupils' English language levels and therefore, whilst the main objective was to complete the survey in English, allowances were made for Spanish translations, particularly for pupils who found it difficult to express themselves in English. This decision was made in order to prioritise the quality of the survey data. The survey questions asked were all the same and also asked in the same order. They were not recorded in audio format. Instead, answers were registered immediately into the pre-prepared excel. They were then transferred to a Google Forms survey which was connected to the same excel. In this way, a table could be

generated automatically to display the data collectively.

Students were asked to keep information and conversation topics private as to prevent them from sharing conversation topics or information about the survey. This variable of the study was more difficult to control, given that it is impossible to keep conversation topics entirely confidential or know to which extent information has been shared. This was done by speaking to both classes separately when presenting the study. The talk was given in Spanish to ensure that everyone understood, as it was important to explain the investigation procedure and answer any questions that students had about the study, confidentiality or the consent forms. The principal aim of maintaining confidentiality was to stop pupils from preparing what they would say, as not only would this make for unnatural language expression but it would also impede the investigation of language comprehension levels.

Prior to taking part in the study, pupils were required to give a consent form to a parent/legal guardian to sign. This was predominantly due to the audio recording that would be taken but also to notify parents/legal guardians that their children were taking part in the study. It was decided that it would be better to notify parents and receive granted consent for the audio recordings.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, various adaptations had to be made in order to make the environment safe. Initially, it was decided that the study could take place outside on the school grounds which was the case for most of the study, until December became too cold and a classroom which was not used often and had many windows for ventilation was approved for use.

The disadvantages of carrying out the study in the open air were often noise and distraction, by and large coming from the main road in front of the centre, as well as passers-by. Furthermore, time management became even more important due to the school timetable affecting the recording schedule and

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the outdoor location of the study entailing longer transitions between pupils.

Conversation Dialogue

It was fundamental to create a conversation dialogue that could be used for every conversation with students in order to regulate dialogue topics and equalise opportunities given to pupils. Each conversation was had in the same order. Furthermore, pupils were asked to keep information disclosed and to keep the conversation confidential.

Questions were repeated or reworded for pupils who had difficulty understanding. In addition, phrases such as “oh really?”, “why?”, “that’s cool”, were used to spur on dialogue and to ensure that it was a two-way conversation without seeming like an interview. To evaluate pupils on a scale of English language communication, a rubric consisting of three language levels was used. Whilst the objective of the language communication levels was primarily to assess expression and comprehension, other factors such as vocabulary use, syntax, grammar and pronunciation were also taken into account in order to evaluate language communication as a whole.

The 6 different stages of evaluation enabled a more accurate level of expression to be calculated. Four or more in the same band of communication signified that the pupil’s communication level was that band. However, on the grounds that pupils achieved three in two different bands, a medium between the two expressions was reached. Therefore, in the results, 5 different English language communication levels would be used.

An excel document was used to complete evaluation. Each student was allocated a tab within the excel document. Each personal tab consisted of the evaluation rubric, the interview questions as a reminder of the conversation model and questions to be asked, as well as the survey questions and answers. The survey answers were later transferred to the Google Forms sheet prepared to collect survey data. The Google Form was also connected to the same excel document, in

which a tab was allocated to collect all survey data in a table.

Survey Questions

It was necessary to create the following survey questions in order to correlate data between the language levels drawn from the evaluation rubric and the information supplied regarding the pupils’ language education experience. Furthermore, it enabled aforementioned issues such as the sense of embarrassment or insecurity of speaking English to be confirmed, or not, and understood to a certain degree. These questions can be seen in the next table.

Table 2. Survey Questions

1. Do you feel comfortable speaking English?	<i>Yes/No/ Sometimes</i>
2. Have you ever had private English lessons or gone to an English school/academy?	<i>Yes/No</i>
3. If so, for how long?	
4. Have you ever been on an exchange or holiday in an English-speaking country?	<i>Yes/No</i>
5. If so, where and for how long/how many times?	
6. What is the thing that has helped you learn English the most?	
7. What would you like more opportunities to do in class?	
8. Do you think you are given enough opportunities to talk and express yourself in English in class?	<i>Yes/No</i>
9. When you are given opportunities to speak English in class, do you actually speak English?	<i>Yes/No/ Sometimes</i>
10. If you don't, why don't you use the opportunities that you are given in class?	

Source: Own Elaboration

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Three sets of questions were used in the survey to tackle various areas of English language education experience and identify learners' needs. Questions 1–5 explored topics mentioned initially in this study such as topics regarding self-consciousness or insecurity when speaking English. Questions 6–8 investigated learner experience both in and out of school and aimed to highlight factors that have had a positive impact on learners' English language acquisition. Lastly, questions 8–10 addressed social stigma in the classroom and prejudice or embarrassment issues that surround the topic of interacting in English in class.

The first set of questions (questions 1–5) were fundamental to identify which percent of pupils feel comfortable speaking English after 10 years of English language education. Other questions such as question 2 and 3, reinforce the results of question 1, as it was of particular interest to discover whether those who have received some form of private English classes or tuition consequently feel a confidence boost when conversing in English. Questions 4 and 5 further reinstate this part of the study and also permit a conclusion to be drawn between English language experiences outside of school with native speakers and language confidence and ability.

The second set of questions (6–8) aimed to investigate learner experience in the classroom and school environment. It was of particular interest to discover which resources, classes or activities had helped pupils learn or improve their English. Moreover, pupils were able to comment on opportunities in class that they would both like more of or already have, indicating learners' needs or desires.

The last set of questions (9–10) aided the identification of social stigma in class. Whilst question 1 identified social security regarding English language interaction, the questions 9–10 aimed to reveal the reasons for this self-consciousness, embarrassment or prejudice perceived in class.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

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As mentioned in the previous section, the data was collected using a spreadsheet and Google Survey Form that was automatically linked to the same spreadsheet. This data collection method enabled all data, from both the conversation and survey to be kept in one document. After collecting all the data, English language communication levels were evaluated and then correlated with the survey results. Furthermore, the Google Form provided pie charts that indicate clear survey results.

Data Analysis

To analyse all data accordingly, firstly, an analysis of the communication levels was made. Secondly, the survey results were analysed separated. Lastly, a correlation of results from both the conversation recordings and the survey results were made in order to identify factors that influence levels of language comprehension and expression.

Only 11% of pupils achieved the highest communication level: expressive and comprehensive English communication after taking English classes at school 2–3 times a week for 10 years. 9.1% of pupils were able to reach a medium between expressive and comprehensive English communication and basic English communication, while 49.1% of pupils achieved a basic English communication level. Therefore, 27.2% of pupils achieved less than a basic language communication level with 3.6% reaching a medium between basic English communication and lack of English comprehension and expression level as it can be seen in the following table:

	High	Medium	Basic	Lack
Pupils	6	7	27	15
%	11%	12.7%	49.1%	27.2%

Source: Own Elaboration

It should be noted that pupils who participated earlier on the study were more likely to achieve a higher band of English language communication. This was due to pupils participating in a voluntary order.

Therefore, it could be concluded that those who were among the first to participate had a higher rate of confidence speaking English.

The survey results were analysed individually in chronological order, using percentages to understand the importance given to certain topics surrounding English language learning experiences amongst all 55 students.

Only 37% of pupils replied that they felt comfortable speaking English after receiving approximately 3 hours of English lessons a week throughout 10 years of school education. 28.3% of pupils said that they did not feel comfortable speaking English at all whereas 34.8% of pupils replied that they only felt comfortable speaking English sometimes.

However, 80.4% said that they had received private English classes or tuition during their primary and/or secondary education. Hereby, less than half of those who have received some form of English language education outside of school feel comfortable speaking English.

35/55 pupils (63.6%) said that they had never been on holiday or on exchange to an English-speaking country. Out of the 20 pupils who had been abroad to an English-speaking country, only 4 pupils had stayed for longer than a month. These results complied with the hypothesis given regarding this survey question.

When asked what has helped to learn English the most, 13 pupils (23.6%) related to either watching series, TV, videos online or listening to music in English. In addition, and not linked to the aforementioned statistic, 5 pupils said that playing video games in English was one of the things that had helped them to learn English the most. Out of all 55 students who took part in the survey, 25 pupils (45.4%) mentioned that school was also one of the things that has helped them to learn English. 15 pupils (27.2%) made a reference to speaking, either at school or with native speakers and said that it helped them to improve their English. 15 pupils considered that attending an English language school outside of school was one of the things that helped to improve their English, although only

1 attributed private tuition as the sole factor that has helped to improve their English the most.

Regarding survey question 7, more opportunities that pupils would like to have in class, 8 pupils reflected specifically on the fact that there is a heavy focus on grammar and vocabulary and little practice or activities that enable them to use their English. In general, 26 pupils said that they would like to speak in English more. Therefore, over half of the pupils (56.5%) who took part in this study claimed that speaking was something that they would like more opportunities to do in class. In addition, 1 student commented on the idea of separating English classes according to language ability and level, as they do not feel able to express themselves in class due to lower comprehension levels. Furthermore, 15 pupils (27.2%) made numerous references to taking part in more activities, projects or dynamic classes that would enable them to put their English into practice. Out of all 55 students, 6 pupils claimed that they would not change anything or did not know what they would change or like more opportunities to do in class.

The data collected from question 7 reoccurs in a different format in question 8, given that many students made references to speaking voluntarily. Survey answers from question 8 reveal that 36 pupils (65.4%) feel that they are indeed given enough opportunities to speak English in class, although 19 pupils (34.5%) reported that they do not feel that they are given enough opportunities to speak English in class. Therefore, it could be concluded that whilst 36 pupils are currently satisfied with the amount of speaking done in class, 19 pupils are not satisfied.

Subsequently, approximately a quarter of pupils (26.1%) replied that they use the opportunities given in class to speak and practise their English. 25 pupils (45.4%) said that they sometimes used the opportunities to speak in English in class, signifying that 15 pupils (27.2%) do not speak English in class when others or the teacher interact with them in English.

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According to survey question 10, 18 pupils (32.7%) made reference to feelings of embarrassment or nervousness when speaking English in class. 25 pupils (45.4%) stated that they either were not able to speak English, found it difficult or didn't know how to speak English in class. 10 pupils (21.8%) said that speaking Spanish was easier or that they spoke Spanish naturally in class without thinking about it.

However, many students who achieved expressive and comprehensive English communication, basic English communication or a medium between the two bands had attended private classes. That said, there were also pupils who had never had private classes or only received private tuition for a year or two and they also achieved expressive and comprehensive English communication, basic English communication or a medium between the two bands. Hence, there is not a clear pattern.

When comparing communication levels and survey question 9 ("when you are given opportunities to speak English in class, do you actually speak English?"), no pupil who achieved lower than a basic communication level said yes. In addition, this group of pupils also answered that they did not feel comfortable speaking English. A conclusion can consequently be drawn regarding self-esteem and progress levels: pupils with low levels of English are likely to feel uncomfortable speaking English and, therefore, do not speak English or practise in class, even when asked questions in English first.

Quality of Data Collection

It is of fundamental importance to analyse the quality of the data provided in this study in order to judge whether it is credible. There were many ways of conducting the study but due to the global pandemic and other factors, there were some limitations of the study. It can be argued that due to the conversation dialogue and the 5-minute time limit, an element of approximation was able to be maintained amongst all conversations held. Furthermore, all questions were asked in the

same order. However, survey answers may have varied more, had they been given in a private online survey that pupils had to complete themselves. Although, it could also be argued that the more personal approach that was taken allowed pupils to verify that they understood the questions. It also encouraged pupils to answer in depth.

Upon reflection of both the conversation dialogue questions and the survey questions, various modifications could have been made in order to analyse certain areas of the study more accurately. Firstly, the conversations varied heavily depending on the week. It was difficult for pupils to talk about what they did over the weekend or what their plans were for the following week. Hereby, pupils answered differently according to the data and the then-current restrictions. In addition, whilst confidentiality was maintained in most senses, it is likely that pupils who participated later on were more likely to understand the investigation procedure, as well as which questions may be asked. This could have affected the comprehension variable of the evaluation rubric.

Secondly, regarding the survey questions, certain study areas could have been analysed with greater quality had questions been more specific or given options from which to choose. For example, asking how many years of private tuition pupils had in order to obtain a more concrete answer instead of the general question asked. Many pupils did a few years of private classes in primary, stopped and took up classes again in secondary. Some pupils only took private classes when they were younger, others only when at secondary school. Therefore, there is no information as to the extent to which they are helped with their English outside of school. As opposed to asking a more specific question such as, "for how many years have you received English tuition outside of school in total?", the answers had to be revised and counted in the spreadsheet. In addition, answers which enabled pupils to answer "sometimes" generalised answers, making them vague and difficult to estimate how

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often, when or in which situations “sometimes” signified “yes” or “no”.

Thirdly, in addition to more concrete questions and answers, options could have been given to pupils to select, such as in question 6 (“what is the thing that has helped you learn English the most?”). Pupils could have ranked their answers in accordance with the things that have helped them to improve their English the most, as often pupils gave more than one answer without emphasising which had been the most impactful or important in terms of their English language improvement.

And fourthly, it should be noted that only 55 students took part in this study and regardless as to it being the whole year group in the vocational cycle, it is a small-scale evaluation. Furthermore, the location and rural area of the school could affect results as pupils in more urban areas are likely to have more exposure to factors such as native speakers or teachers with higher levels of English.

There were also various limitations of data collection which may have affected data collection negatively. These limitations were mainly due to factors such as timetables or internet connection, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and maintaining class “bubbles”. Firstly, a factor that may have limited the study was that data collection was not all completed on the same day. Furthermore, towards the end of November and December, the study had to be done indoors in a ventilated classroom due to the increasingly cold temperatures outdoors. Therefore, pupils may have felt more comfortable in different environments and this may have impeded concentration, self-esteem and privacy.

Secondly, internet connection was irregular due to the outdoor location but also due to the number of classes that were using their laptops. When many classes use their laptops, the internet connection slows immediately. Due to the chosen method of data collection (Google Spreadsheet and Google Forms), internet connection was needed throughout the whole of data collection. As a consequence, when internet

connection was slow or down, it either slowed or halted data collection.

And lastly, there were pupils who wished to explain more feedback when taking the survey. However, due to the limitation of time, whilst their main ideas or opinions were made known, it was not possible for pupils to expand on their opinions or arguments.

Data Collection Improvement

Reflecting upon parts of the data collection process, it is now evident that certain elements could have been more adapted or suitable for such a study. For example, the interview questions that were formed to create a model of a similar conversation with every pupil and myself did exactly that; however, given the circumstances of the pandemic, asking what someone did last weekend and what their plans are for the following weekend does not enable much conversation variety. Many pupils would reply, “nothing” or “not much”, as during some of the weeks of data collection, bars, restaurants, gyms and theatres were closed, as well as extracurricular activities.

A further aspect of data collection improvement could have been finding a way to analyse more natural language such as hellos and goodbyes, as well as small talk. Often when greeting pupils and meeting them to do the interview and survey, we would ask questions or say something in English in a natural language context and it was clear that some found it difficult to understand or reply naturally. Many times, when we said, “have a nice day” or “take care”, to pupils, they struggled to reply or understand the real-life language situation. A simple reply such as, “you too”, was rarely given, although occasionally those with a higher level of English were able to take part in some small talk prior or after the interview. An additional way of studying this could have been by completing the survey in English and evaluating language use and participation throughout the survey, as well. This could have been incorporated into the study in the event of a more detailed investigation.

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Moreover, an interesting factor that could have been developed more is enjoyment and importance in English language learning experience. The survey could have included questions asking for direct feedback concerning the education received at both primary school and secondary school. For example, do you remember learning English at primary and secondary school? Did you enjoy learning English? Do you enjoy learning English now? Do you want to learn English? Do you think English is important?

A further factor that could have been adjusted to facilitate a quicker data collection process would have been creating an authorisation process that took less time. This could have been done simply by giving the forms to pupils at an earlier date and also by setting a deadline for pupils to return the signed consent form. Alternatively, a different authorisation process could have been used, for example, via email, online forms or telephone.

Relating to survey question answer options, various elements could have been improved. As opposed to open questions in which pupils could reply anything, it could have been more effective to give a set of options, as well as permitting an open answer. This would have been particularly useful in the study of certain factors such as in question 7 for discovering which opportunities pupils would like to have in class; more speaking, less grammar, more activities in English, more games, exchange and experiences in English-speaking countries, etc.

A technical matter on the organisation of the data collection was the difficulty of the authorisation process; the consent form which was approved by the centre headteacher to give to all pupils participating in the study. Before collecting data or interviewing, each pupil was required to hand in the consent form, signed by a parent or legal guardian. The main reason for this was to have written consent in order to record audios of the conversations. At first, it seemed necessary to record the conversations, should we decide to change an evaluation factor. It was also useful to play back conversation to double-check

evaluation, although after the first few conversations, the evaluation process became more fluent and we could complete the evaluation rubric within the first couple of minutes of the conversation.

In some cases, the consent forms were not problematic and pupils brought them back signed within the same week. However, in other cases, pupils lost the consent forms or forgot to ask their parents/guardians to sign them. There were several data collection sessions that were slowed down due to the collection of consent forms, as well as reminders that had to be given weekly in both classes. Whilst the initial plan was to carry out the study during each class's scheduled English lesson, the extension of data collection sessions meant that some pupils were taken out of other subject classes in order to take part in the study. This was only done on two days at two different hours and permission was always given by the teacher of the subject. As a consequence, the consent forms slowed the process of data collection and the study itself, as many more data collection sessions had to be done than originally planned.

Another aspect of data collection organisation was that the timescale for each recording and survey took between 5–15 minutes depending on the pupil. This was largely due to the survey as some pupils were able to answer quicker or in less depth, whereas other pupils shared more of their opinion and expanded their answers in depth. In addition to the varying timescale per pupil, there was also a transition period in which pupils had to summon others. This took between 2-10 minutes depending on the classroom and was also due to the location where the study was carried out.

In addition, COVID-19 adaptations signified working outdoors in which external variables such as noise were more difficult to control. This caused several distractions and noise to disrupt speaking or pause conversations or survey questions temporarily. In the event of moving indoors due to noise or cold weather, a ventilated available classroom had to be located and permission granted in order to use it.

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CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The aim of this study was primarily to investigate the status of the students' English language capacity and needs after having completed primary and secondary education at school. It was also to conduct a study that would further explore the language acquisition process pupils undergo in order to achieve various language levels and abilities.

In terms of needs, this study was able to identify popular demand for more dynamic English classes, activities using English language, as opposed to rigid exercises incorporating a heavy focus on grammar; perhaps a small introduction to CLIL or more project-based activities could satisfy these demands. The subject of language groups and classes was also mentioned; language groups could be divided into different groups according to their English level in order to equalise language abilities within classes and eliminate self-esteem or self-consciousness issues in class. Furthermore, the interest in speaking with a native speaker was apparent. Essentially, demands concerning opportunities to speak English highlighted pupils' needs for more speaking-orientated language learning.

As for the language acquisition process that is undergone, many pupils acknowledged the grammar-based English language education that they had received at secondary school and the lack of experiences with native speakers, as well as few trips abroad. However, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with this factor.

Results from the speaking analysis of the study show that a mere 13% of pupils have achieved an expressive and comprehensive English communication level after 10 years of in-school language education. In most cases, few of these pupils had done so without private tuition or experiences abroad with native speakers. In turn, 28% of pupils fell on the opposite end of the spectrum, attaining less than basic English communication; a result which was also hypothesised earlier on in the

study. As a consequence, it should be made clear that in one way or another, the ELT school system is failing its pupils.

This study proves that after 10 years of English language education, this objective is not only not being attained in primary level—at an age where language acquisition is typically less complicated—but after 4 more intense years of English language education at secondary school level, less than a quarter of pupils are able to achieve above a basic level of English language communication.

A further topic addressed in this study was self-esteem and confidence in English language communication. Almost a third of pupils said that they did not feel comfortable speaking English, reaching the 20-50% hypothesis made earlier on in the study. Embarrassment or self-consciousness proved to be a topic of concern amongst 13% of pupils. Ties of shame in language learning are not uncommon; however, the emotions intrinsically connected to shame such as introversion, self-consciousness and embarrassment also have a negative impact on learning. It is therefore of utmost importance to create an environment in which pupils are able to communicate freely in English without feeling judged or shamed.

Solutions and changes that can improve English language teaching and learning experience which can be drawn from this study are the use of more dynamic classes and activities that enable pupils to use their language. A pivotal change that will surely change language teaching and personal efforts to study amongst pupils is assessment methods. In the event that these assessments gave more importance to speaking, English language education would be more balanced and pupils would make more of an effort to learn and speak English in class.

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