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Factors that Affect Students' Performance While Taking an EFL e-learning Course at Lingo Centre Language School

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“Factors that Affect Students’ Performance While Taking an EFL e-learning Course at LingoCentre School”

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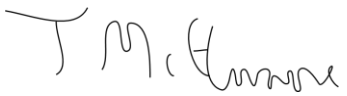

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ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language has always represented a challenge for many people. In addition, teachers and institutions have developed better methodologies in teaching, providing students with the necessary tools in order to obtain successful EFL learning outcomes. During 2020 and 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic shook the world and many changes came as a result. One of the most important was education. Face-to-face classes changed to online sessions in which teachers and institutions did their best to maintain good quality in their newly-renamed virtual classrooms. This thesis provides educators with the theoretical framework necessary to choose and employ the most appropriate internet tools and methodologies in their language classroom. It also reviews some foreign language e-learning theories that can assist in the creation of a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) environment for the benefit of EFL e-learners. This research also presents the theoretical and technical requirements for any successful foreign language learner and aspects that they need to take into account in order to succeed in their English language learning goals. Finally, it enumerates and categorizes factors that can affect the students' performance when taking an EFL e-learning course.

DEDICATORY

Thanks to my mom whose life has supported mine to this day.

Thanks to my husband for all his patience and advice when I wanted to give up. You are home.

Thanks to my daughter for being the light and reason.

Thanks to my grandparents, you have always been my guide and support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. 0 Introduction

Learning a foreign language has increased in importance for many people in their lives. This has always represented a challenge for teachers who, over time, have found new ways to update their teaching methods. Inside the classrooms, students from different generations have witnessed major changes in methodologies. In general, education has evolved all around the world in different stages, obviously at different speeds according to each country's resources. Here in Mexico, education has progressed from the use of archaic tools like chalk and blackboards, the transparency projector or visual support in "telesecundarias", to the implementation of more modern tools such as computers and smartboards inside the classrooms (Navarrete-Cazales and Manzanilla-Granados, 2017).

Some years ago, a new way to learn started to happen in different places, when people faced the need to study at a distance. As mentioned by Navarrete-Cazales and Manzanilla-Granados (2017), distance education in Mexico started with a basic method: materials for studying were sent by mail and replied to in the same way by students. Over time, distance education found other ways to share materials and knowledge, then distance education was bolstered with the invention of PCs and the internet. Moreover, the same authors suggest that distance education has evolved step by step along with the evolution of technological tools (TICs) until the beginning of the e-learning methodology. In this type of methodology, the teaching-learning process occurs in a virtual or online environment. For instance, teachers and students interact through electronic tools such as forums, chatrooms, video calls and platforms. Some Mexican institutions already have access to programs based on e-learning methodology and many of them pay for cutting-edge platforms and software.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, people around the world face many different situations and processes which have changed our current reality. One of the most important is education. The teaching-learning process has been abruptly taken from schools into a completely virtual setting. This change has made us turn our attention to distance education and e-learning because these are the only ways in which education can be carried on. According to Teo and Williams (2005), e-learning implies commitment from both parts: the institution and the learners. As in any kind of methodology, the planning, guidance and orientation is the teachers' work; meanwhile, the students' work is to manage their time and activities as well as to overcome challenges and obstacles that they can face in the process.

Although most public schools in Mexico have based their work on the distance education system, private schools have moved all their classes online and here is where the main concern of this research begins. Therefore, this chapter presents the rationale for the topic selection, which is establishing the identified gap that needs to be filled. Secondly, the significance of the study in this chapter is that it presents the importance of developing this research based on e-learning. Therefore, the participants on whom this research is based will be described in the context of the research section. Once the setting is explained, the aims for this research will be presented and this leads us to the specific objectives that this paper will follow in order to gather the data needed. Finally, the research questions that this work intends to answer and the conclusion are presented.

1.1 Rationale for the Topic Selection

"After centuries of very little change, we are now on the brink of a major paradigm shift; a key factor being the 'disruptive technology' of eLearning'' (Hart & Christensen, 2002 in Teo & Williams, 2005, p. 1). Educators should make the most of this opportunity in order to have a breakthrough in the e-learning education system. Although most teachers and students are used to managing technology, they face new software and challenges in this new reality. Some students seem to have a hard time maintaining a good rhythm in their class work during e-learning, while some students have mentioned that it is hard for them

to concentrate or that they prefer to have face-to-face classes. As mentioned by Richards (2020), "Some of these kids really need one-on-one sessions, but that's almost impossible for them to get in a virtual setting. Quantifying the extent of learning loss is difficult'' (para. 24). Therefore, this paper will enumerate factors that affect students' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning process in an e-learning class.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The IISUE (2020) mentions that due to the current pandemic there is a large list of complaints about the possibility of continuing with the school year due to the monotony with which the topics are presented. These issues are affecting the students' performance and their motivation to continue studying. This is a real concern for teachers who work online. The results obtained from this work will serve as a useful tool for language teachers who want to reflect more profoundly upon their practice by having a more meaningful understanding of how hypotheses and practice contrast in the application of their e-learning English courses and how they can improve them. According to Mayes and de Freitas (2004), changing practice requires changes in the understanding of standards that are sometimes implicitly assumed in the practices. By enumerating a sample of important issues to consider whenever language teachers design an online English course or classes, this survey will offer a framework of understanding where a particular usage of e-learning is situated in the current scene of technology-enhanced teaching.

On the other hand, this work will provide a list of obstacles that students may face when taking an online English course so they can be prepared to avoid or minimize any negative impact that studying online could bring.

1.3 Context of the Research

This research will take place in a private language learning center in which people of all ages have been taking on-line classes for a year. In order to carry out this study, the main subjects for this research will be 15 to 45-year-old students. The students take 3 to 5 hours of classes a week. They have semi-customized courses; this means that the teacher works

with one to four students at a time. They have virtual sessions by Zoom platform once or twice a week. They also have their own course book to work with. The teacher provides extra information and exercises by e-mail or using an instant messenger platform such as Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger or Telegram.

1.4 Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to explore the different problems that students can face when taking an English language course through e-learning. In addition, this study will identify the different factors that can cause these problems. Consequently, once the difficulties are identified, this paper will analyze the data obtained in order to propose a list of issues that EFL language teachers can take into account when designing their virtual classes.

1.5 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the problems that participants face when learning EFL through e-learning.
- To identify the factors that caused participants problems when learning EFL through e-learning.

1.6 Research Questions

The research questions that this study will answer are:

- What are the factors that affect participants' performance when they learn EFL through e-learning?
- Are these factors mainly external or internal?
- What are the main problems caused by the identified factors that affect participants' EFL learning?

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly given a general overview of this research. Education has undergone a huge change during the last year due to the pandemic. School education was taken out of the classroom and distance education was implemented in public schools. On the other hand, some private schools began to work completely online. Although some institutions already had online programs and methods, some others did not. This led to big changes in the way teachers and students work. Consequently, there have been some issues that have affected the learning process and this research will try to analyze what factors can affect the aforementioned process. This chapter presented a broad overview of this research. In the following section, the literature review related to this research will be presented.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical framework behind the e-learning methodology which is derived from some second-language learning theories and funnels down to their specific application to online education. It will also explain the main characteristics that any e-learning foreign language course needs in order to provide students with the best online environment and tools. Some examples of such e-learning tools are going to be listed. Particularly, this research intends to explore the different factors that could affect e-learning foreign language processes.

2.1 E-learning: Definitions and Characteristics

This section introduces information in order to understand the fundamental principles of e-learning, how it is defined, what the components are that support this methodology and which elements are essential when designing an e-learning course. Firstly, the most important concept to define is: What is e-learning? Karmakar and Nath (2014) state that e-learning is considered to be a learning method that takes place online. This method has been defined by different terminologies; with the purpose of understanding the landscape of e-learning, some definitions are going to be described in the following section.

Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016) mention that in a journal article titled *Synthesis of research of electronic learning*, e-learning was defined as "learning via electronic sources, such as television, computer, video disk, teletext, videotext" (White, 1983, p. 13). Some years later we can find that the e-learning concept has taken on a wider variety of definitions. Starting with the fact that 'e' stands for electronic, e-learning refers to the use of electronic applications and processes to learn and sometimes there are certain variations in the name used by different authors, such as online learning, e-learning and eLearning.

Karmakar and Nath (2014) claim that e-learning had been called *Internet-Based Training*, then *Web-Based Training*. This methodology is different from distance education because of the medium in which resources are shared, but at the same time the term implies that the participants involved are at a distance and that the students use some sort of technology in order to access the learning material and to interact with the instructor or teacher and other learners. Therefore, e-learning is essentially the network that enables the transmission of information, abilities and knowledge. As mentioned by the same authors, e-learning can include the use of many different tools such as texts, audio recordings, videos and animations. It also includes technological applications and processes such as computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration, so it needs internet information and communication systems. Moreover, Picciano (2017) mentions that Anderson (2011. p. 53) noted that "online learning as a subset of distance education has always been concerned with provision of access to educational experience that is, at least more flexible in time and in space as [sic] campus-based education" (p. 53). The Institute for Interactive Technologies (2006) defines e-learning as "a means of education that integrates self-motivation, communication, efficiency and technology" (Comerchero, 2006. p.19). According to this author, e-learning has some important characteristics and factors that make it efficient, which are: *means of communication, schedule, class structure* and *technology*.

Means of communication: E-learning can be carried out only through online applications and in some cases, some face-to-face communication can be included. This creates *blended learning.*

Schedule: E-learning can be synchronous or asynchronous. *Synchronous* means that some real-time sessions are implemented via videoconferences, teleconferencing and online chat programs. *Asynchronous* takes place when the communication between students and instructor do not require real time responses. This includes emails, list servers, blogs or forums.

E-learning class structure: this explains how the class is managed. Self-paced instruction is managed by giving the learner the materials they need to complete training and they are also responsible for staying on task and schedule. In an instructor-led class, there is interaction with the teacher who monitors the learner's progress.

Technology: this element is the most variable in e-learning due to its constant evolution. At the moment, there is a large list of options in which e-learning can be performed. These are called tools for education, and they are going to be mentioned at some points ahead.

2.2 E-learning Evolution in Mexico

Education models have evolved over the years as technology has, adapting to the reality and needs of the times. This evolution is conditioned by the appearance of new technologies. Reyes Gonzalez (n.d.) presents a timeline in which the evolution of e-learning is observed as follows:

- 1990 "Enseñanza colaborativa y las plataformas de aprendizajes ligados a la Internet"- Collaborative teaching and platforms linked to the internet. This type of education merges with the "Enseñanza abierta"-Distance Learning. It can be asynchronous by using e-mails, forums, etc., or synchronous by using chats, video chats, etc.
- 1996 E-learning concept was born. The process is carried out through the internet and it is characterized by the physical separation between teachers and students. Continuous interaction between learners and teachers is both synchronous and asynchronous.
- 2006 M-learning appears. This is a new development in e-learning. It is a concept used to refer to a learning environment based on mobile technology focused on improving the teaching-learning process.
- 2009 to the present Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). These are online courses that are carried out in an asynchronous manner with no registration limit.

According to Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2014), there were other concepts related to e-learning such as:

- 2012 Little Open Online Course (LOOC) by Kolowich. These online courses pay special attention on the direct instructions given from the teacher to learners.
- 2013 Small Private Online Course (SPOC) by Fox. This type of online course was used as a complement to, not a replacement for, traditional face-to-face teaching.

2.3 E-learning Approaches

Some authors agree that in order to form a theoretical framework of e-learning, some traditional learning theories have to be mentioned because of their particular similarities. Although Anderson (2011) has examined if a unique theory for online education can be developed, many other authors argue that some "traditional" theoretical frameworks are relevant in order to have a better understanding of the pedagogical aspects in online education.

Bjerg (2014) mentions that Ally (2004) introduced three traditional learning approaches: behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism. This author also mentions that Gass and Selinker (2008), Chapelle (2009) and Wang and Vásquez (2012) outline how behaviorist, cognitivist and sociocultural constructivist approaches have directly influenced research and theories in second language learning. The previously mentioned authors concur with the fact that many theoretical concepts influence e-learning approaches, designs, tasks, content and programs. These traditional theories will be briefly described in order to have a clear overview of the e-learning theoretical framework.

2.3.1 Behaviourism

Based on Pavlov's experiments in the early 1900's, Skinner introduced what he called "operant condition" which emphasizes the use of positive and negative

reinforcement to help individuals learn new behaviors. Picciano (2017) mentions that Suppes based his Early Computer Assisted Instructional (CAI) model on Skinner's Behaviorism; it relied on encouragement and repetition to promote positive learning activities. As pointed out by Warschauer (in Bjerg, 2014), the first computer program created to assist language learning was developed based on behaviorist language-learning approaches by using drill and practice tasks. According to this method, repeated exposure to the same material is imperative in learning. Warschauer named the first stage of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) "Behaviorist CALL".

2.3.2 Cognitivism

Contrary to Behaviorism, Cognitivism emphasizes the importance of thought processes in learning. This theory is seen as a process that involves memory, thinking, abstraction, reflection and metacognition. According to Ally (2004) and Mitchell and Myles (2002) (in Bjerg, 2014), the main characteristic in the cognitive language learning process is that the received input is transformed into intake and then it can be transferred from the short-term memory into the long-term memory. In computer or internet-based cognitive approaches it is important that content and learning tasks are presented in different ways to subsequently be stored in the learner's long-term memory. As mentioned by Petersen (in Bjerg, 2014), different e-learning enhancing-input processing strategies and tasks based on cognitivist approaches should be created for online second language teaching.

2.3.3 Constructivism or Socio-Cultural Approaches

Constructivism is not an online learning theory but many of the models mentioned above derive from Constructivist principles. Picciano (2017) mentions several education theorists including Lev Vigotsky, John Dewey and Jean Piaget whose contributions to the matter, by describing the teaching and learning as an interactive social phenomenon, serve as a foundation in any online learning theory. Vigotsky described the learning process by settling a "Zone of proximal development" in which a social environment is provided by the teacher where the learners can construct the necessary knowledge together to solve the

given problem. Dewey (1916) proposed learning as various social experiences where learners learn by collaborating and reflecting with each other. Finally, Piaget based his learning theory on four stages of cognitive development; each one helps link and construct new knowledge with the previous knowledge.

For Constructivist or Socio-Cultural Approaches in second language learning theories, it is essential that the learners construct their own knowledge in an active manner. According to Ally (2004), Chapelle and Thomas (in Bjerg, 2014. p.44), "online learners should be allowed to construct knowledge rather than being given knowledge through instruction". Moreover, learners should have the possibility to interact with the teacher and classmates online as a main resource.

Bada (2015) pointed out that two of the key concepts mentioned by Driscoll (2000) within constructivist learning theory are *accommodation* and *assimilation*. By assimilating, the learner incorporates new experiences into old experiences. This permits the learner to develop new perspectives, rethink if there were any misunderstandings and evaluate what is important to finally change their perception. Accommodation, on the other hand, is reframing new experiences into the mental references they already have and when things do not operate within that new context, learners have to accommodate those expectations to the outcomes.

Finally, Ally (2004) states that Behaviorism, Constructivism and Cognitivism have had a major impact on the designing of online materials in the way that behaviorist strategies can be used to teach the facts (vocabulary and structures in basic levels); cognitivist strategies to teach the principles and processes (linking new to old knowledge in intermediate levels); and constructivist strategies to teach about 'real life' and personal applications or context (speaking practice and skills development in upper intermediate to advanced levels).

2.4 E-learning Theories

Ally (2004) defined online learning as the process of accessing learning materials, to interact with content, the instructor and other learners through the internet. This process is also supported by the instructor in order to construct personal meaning and acquire knowledge from the experiences provided. Some of the e-learning models and their components are going to be explained in this section.

2.4.1 Community of Inquiry Model

Garrison, Anderson & Archer's (2000) "Community of inquiry model" for online environments is mainly based on three distinct "presence" concepts: cognitive, social and teaching. In addition, in 2011 Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (in Picciano, 2017) continued their research and extended each component. Their model unites the design of online and blended courses where those "presence" components are part of the active learning environments through interaction between students and instructors by using discussion boards, blogs, wikis and videoconferences. The following diagram, taken from Picciano's article "Theories and Frameworks for Online Education: Seeking an Integrated Model" (Figure 1, 2017. p.174), shows how these "*presences*" interact in an e-learning context.

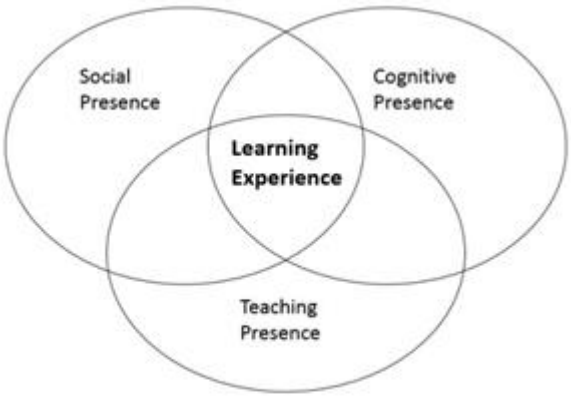


Figure 4. Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, Garrison and Archer, 2000)

Figure 1. "Theories and Frameworks for Online Education: Seeking an Integrated Model". (Picciano, 2017)

2.4.2 Connectivism

One of the first pioneers in Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was George Siemens (2004), who proposed the Connectivism model that recognizes major shifts within the way information and knowledge drift, grow and change due to the vast data communication networks. Briefly, Connectivism is a theory driven by the flow of information, making the experience of learning a process that happens within a wave of changing information not entirely under the control of the student. This information connection enables the student to learn more but in order to accomplish this, teachers must provide experiences and constantly evolving information. As specified by Picciano (2017), Siemens (2004) claimed that Connectivism is a more appropriate model for large groups whose main goal is to create and develop knowledge rather than to disseminate it.

2.4.3 Online Collaborative Learning (OCL)

Online Collaborative Learning is a theory, proposed by Harasim (in Picciano, 2017), whose main focal point is based on collaborative learning and knowledge building supported principally by the internet. The Online Collaborative Learning model arises from Constructivism, because students are encouraged to collaborate in solving a problem and the teacher acts as a facilitator as well. This model has three different phases:

Idea generating. Different thoughts are gathered as in a brainstorm.

Idea organizing. In this phase the ideas are discussed, compared, analyzed and categorized.

Intellectual convergence. The intellectual synthesis and consensus occur by the doing of an assignment, an essay or other piece of work.

2.4.4 E-learning Systems Theoretical Framework

Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016), have proposed an e-learning system that is based on three main pillars, which are:

· **People.** This refers to students, teachers and institutions, among other stakeholders involved.

· **Technologies.** This includes e-learning hardware and content, such as electronic documents, digital audio recordings and videos, electronic tools and programs that enable communication and collaboration among the participants.

· **Services.** This refers to the pedagogical models and instructional strategies that are the principal designed output provided in this methodology by the institutions involved.

The following figure (Figure 2) displays the main classifications mentioned above and was extracted from Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016), p. 302.

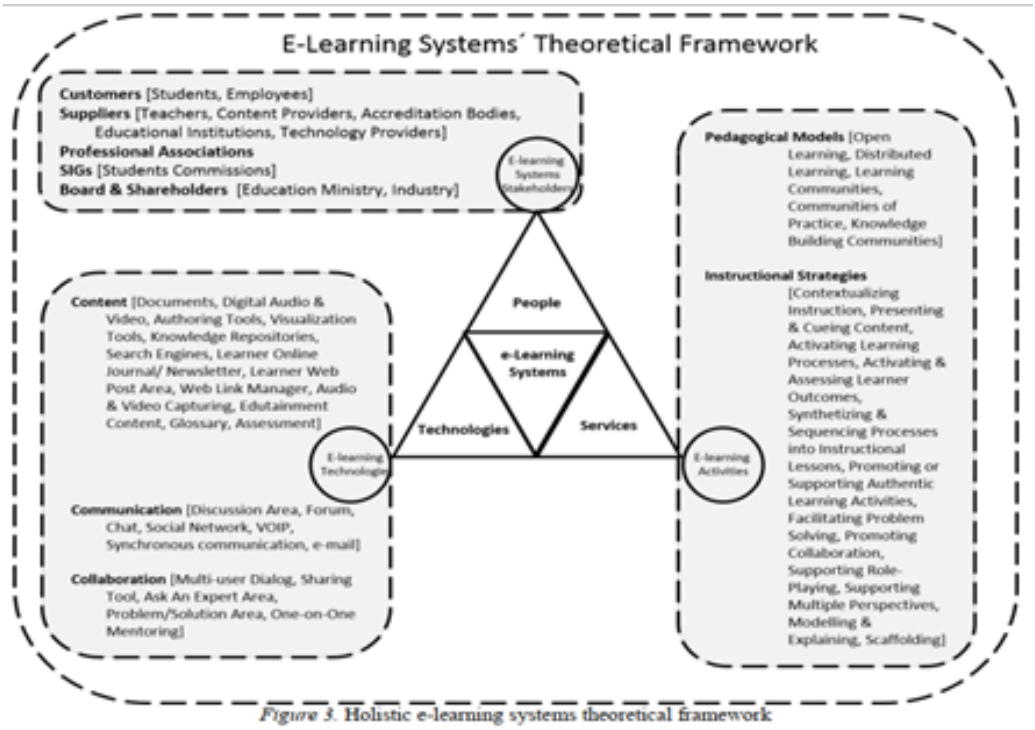


Figure 3. Holistic e-learning systems theoretical framework

Figure 2. Holistic e-learning systems theoretical framework. Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira (2016).

2.4.5 Common Integrated Theory

Anderson (2011) proposed the possibility of making an e-learning integrated theory taking into account the distance education perspective, while he acknowledged the fact

that many theorists and authors consider e-learning as a subset of learning in general. Anderson focused on Bransford, Brown and Coking's work (1999), which suggests that an effective learning environment should be framed by four overlapping perspectives: community-centeredness, knowledge-centeredness, learner-centeredness and assessment-centeredness. These categories provided the foundational framework for Anderson's approach as he researched Johansen (1992) and Shank (1993), who first compared hyperlinking with constructivism. He also pointed to the characteristics and facilities that the internet provides, commenting that the internet's hyperlinking capacity is most compatible with the way human knowledge is stored and accessed.

With those elements in mind, Anderson added another important point to the equation by separating community-collaborative and self-paced instructional models, commenting that they are inherently incompatible. Anderson illustrates the two main human actors and how they interact with each other and with content which they can find in a variety of formats on the web in the following chart. However, students can decide whether to have the guidance and evaluation of a teacher. The interaction can take place in any net-based synchronous or asynchronous activities. This first model has the characteristic of having regular sessions or group-paced learning. On the other hand, the second part of this model, shown on the right, illustrates the structured learning tools associated with independent learning. Some common tools proposed in this model are computer-assisted tutorials, drills and simulations. (Figure 3 taken from The Theory and Practice of Online Learning, Anderson, 2011. p. 61)

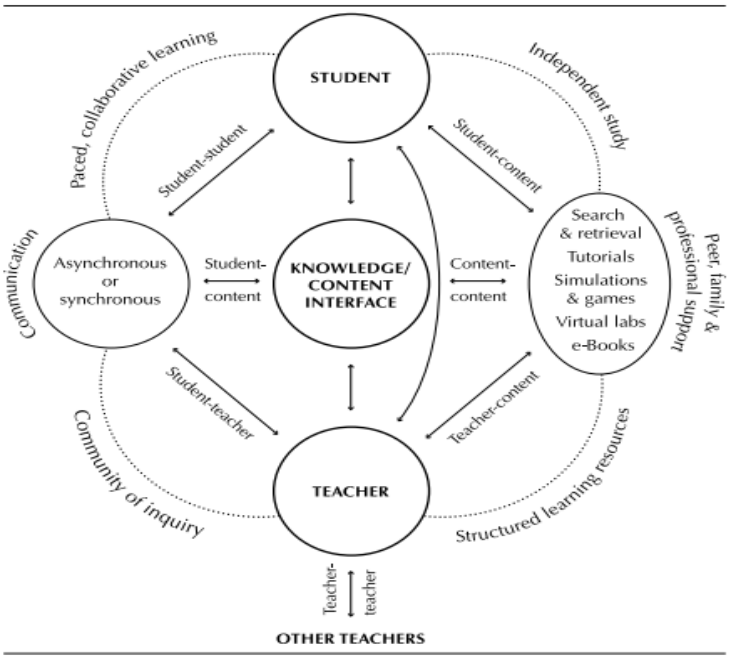


FIGURE 4. A model of online learning

Figure 3. "A model of online learning". The Theory and Practice of Online Learning, Anderson, (2011).

2.4.6 Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model

Bosch (2016) reviewed instructional technology, and he also identified and compared four blended e-learning models with twenty-one different design components. These models emphasized the integration of pedagogy and technology in e-learning course design. Among the models is the *Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model* (figure 4 taken from Theories and Frameworks for Online Education: Seeking an Integrated Model. Picciano, 2017. p. 179). This model contains six pedagogical goals or learning modules and the approaches for achieving them. Bosch mentions that this model is flexible and assumes that more modules can be added or removed as needed and that one of the most important features of this model is that approaches are driven by pedagogy to support students' learning by blending together into a coherent whole. The content will be described in the following paragraphs.

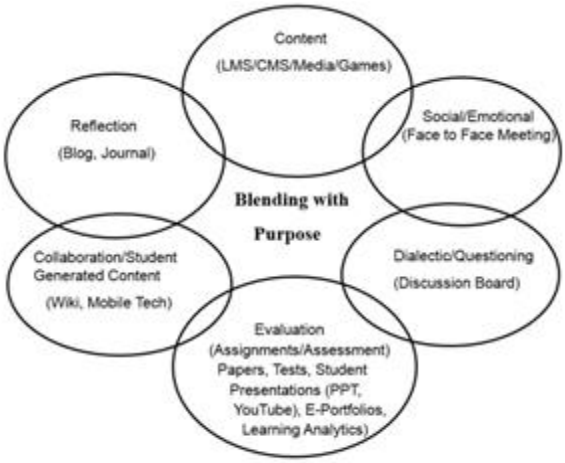


Figure 7. Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model

Figure 4. Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model from Theories and Frameworks for Online Education: Seeking an Integrated Model. (Picciano, 2017).

2.4.6.1 Content

Picciano (2017) states that content can be presented in a variety of ways. The Blending with Pedagogical Purpose Model suggests that multiple technologies and media can be utilized. Mayer (in Picciano, 2017) concludes after extensive research that learning is greatly enhanced by visualization. Some course-learning management systems such as Canva, Blackboard or Moodle provide the teacher with basic media content including text, video and audio. This author also mentions that some video games have evolved to a point that they can be used as a kind of tool which plays a large role in instructional content.

2.4.6.2 Social-emotional

Social and emotional development, according to Picciano (2017, p.180), “must be acknowledged as important to education at all levels''. He also mentions that in fully online programs and courses, faculty members can reinforce social and emotional support where possible and appropriate by using face-to-face online tools. Some examples of face-to-face online tools are videoconferencing programs such as Zoom, Meet and Teams, among others.

2.4.6.3 Dialectics and Questioning

By means of dialogs and questioning, the same author proposes that faculty members can verify what students know and then help them refine their knowledge. These types of speaking and questioning activities can be carried out with an electronic threaded discussion board or forum.

2.4.6.4 Reflection

Picciano (2017) explains that "There is an extensive body of scholarship on the 'reflective teacher' and the 'reflective learner' dating from the early 20th century (Dewey, 1916; Schon, 1983)." In the same article this author explains that this kind of pedagogical activity requires students to share their reflections on what they have learned with the teacher and classmates. Some online tools that instructors can use in order to do these activities are online blogs.

2.4.6.5 Collaborative Learning

The author also points out that collaborative learning has evolved over decades. Many professional programs profoundly trust this problem-solving classroom technique. In the past, the logistics and time needed for effective collaboration were problematic from time to time. Nowadays in e-learning courses the use of emails, mobile technology and other electronic communication tools relieves those issues.

2.4.6.6 Evaluation

"Evaluation is perhaps the most important component of the model. CMSs/LMSs and other online tools and platforms provide a number of mechanisms to assist in this area" (Picciano, 2017, p. 181). According to this author, assignments, tests, papers and portfolios are the most used methods for students' learning assessment as well as being helpful for teachers to assess their own teaching by examining what worked and what did not in a class. Finally, e-learning technological tools permit continuous sharing of evaluation and assessment activities, and provide permanent access to any activity and evaluation for students and teachers.

2.5 Characteristics of E-learning Resources

Fahy (in Anderson, 2008) claims that e-learning technologies, such as texts, graphics, videos, videoconferencing, audio recordings, social software, games with educational purposes, are always evolving and this is the main reason that teachers must be up to date in technological trends. According to Ally and Fahy (2005), students' e-learning styles and preferences can affect their feeling of isolation, which requires the teacher to design their classes according to students' preferences and needs. At the same time, these e-learning resources share pedagogical importance and should be mixed together and used in synchronous courses in order to achieve good quality of content and interaction. A clear example of the utility of the above-mentioned e-learning resources is shown below (figure 5. Association of synchronous audio, data exchange and video presence, with information exchange and relationship building objectives. In Anderson, 2008. p. 180), in which Picard associates audio, video and data and information exchange in order to achieve high learning effectiveness. Although Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (in Anderson, 2008) argue that being able to respond to students' demands requires technological teaching skills, students are expected to be more autonomous and disciplined (Vrasidas and McIsaac in Anderson, 2008).

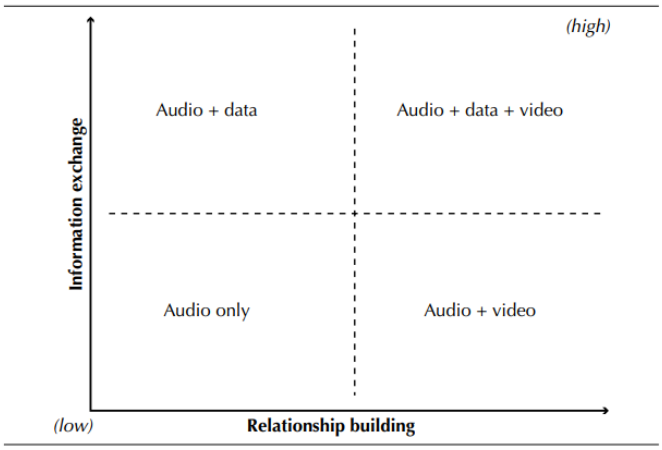


Figure 5. Association of synchronous audio, data exchange and video presence, with information exchange and relationship building objectives. (In Anderson, 2008. p. 180).

2.5.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of E-learning

Advantages: The Institute for Interactive Technologies (2006) gives a long list of reasons that will be mentioned below. E-learning can be beneficial for education, institutions and students. It is affordable, it saves time and produces measurable results. Flexibility is another main benefit of E-learning. Some students like to adapt to different learning styles. They can learn at their own pace and choose materials that are suitable for their level of knowledge. Another important point is that e-learning encourages students to take personal responsibility for their own self-knowledge and self-confidence.

Disadvantages: the aforementioned authors highlight the biggest disadvantage of e-learning: it is necessary to have access to a computer with an internet connection. Learners also need to have technological skills and feel comfortable when using computers, otherwise they can feel frustrated and give up. E-learning also requires as much time as attending classes, so students have to be highly motivated. If bad studying habits are added, students may get lost and fail or do poorly. Another disadvantage of E-learning is that students may feel isolated from the instructor and classmates, so they need to have discipline to work independently.

2.6 Characteristics of Successful Learners in E-learning

Iowa State University (2001) defined e-learning as "web-delivered or web-supported computer teaching and learning, multimedia, internet and technologies. Therefore, e-learners are those who participate in the e-learning process" (Institute of Interactive Technologies, 2006. p.44). This is a new concept; however, it depends a lot on them to make this new form of distance education a success. The e-learning process involves a great deal of communication and commitment in which being prepared is a priority too. Additional studies have found that some general characteristics arise in those who are successful in e-learning courses. In a survey of the Department of Instructional Technology's e-learning Concepts and Techniques Spring 2006, online learners were asked: *What factors/skills*

contribute to being a successful student in an e-learning class? Some of their most relevant characteristic responses are:

- ✓ Self-discipline
- ✓ Self-motivation
- ✓ Patience
- ✓ Communicative skills
- ✓ Software and hardware skills
- ✓ Good time management
- ✓ Ability to work independently

This also leads us to conclude that motivation is a crucial factor in learning a second language and is influenced by variables like the learner's personality and attitudes. Such topics are going to be presented in the following section.

2.7 The Role of Motivation in EFL E-learning

Students could face personal factors that affect their performance in the EFL e-learning process. Such factors can increase or decrease their motivation in learning. Fen and Kiat (2015) remark that motivation has been widely accepted as a key factor in the learners' success in EFL learning at all stages of their education. Having mentioned that, it is necessary to define what motivation is. Smith (2008) mentions that Keller (1983) proposed motivation as the magnitude and direction of behavior, and the degree of effort students will exert in that respect. Wang (2009) includes Gardner's (1985) emphasis on motivation as the primary factor influencing students in English learning. Gardner believed that motivation for language learning cannot only include goal achievement but the combination of effort and internal desire to achieve the objective of learning the language and positive attitudes toward learning the language. As Abdul et al. (2012, p.432) stated, "Motivation plays a vital role in language learning without which even gifted individuals cannot accomplish long-term goals, whatever the curricula and whoever the teacher".

Some other authors have talked about motivation in EFL e-learning more recently. Wang (2009, p.1) states that "Motivation is one of the most important factors that influences English learning achievement" because it has a close relationship with students' success or failure. It is also mentioned that motivation for language learning cannot only be oriented into a specific goal, but it is also a combination of effort and desire to achieve the goal of learning a foreign language which comes with the right attitudes towards it. Smith (2008) also proposes that motivation has been seen as an essential component in the designing of an e-learning environment for a long time. This means that proper instructional design and suitable learning activities would guarantee that students would be engaged in the learning experience.

2.7.1 Extrinsic Motivation and Intrinsic Motivation.

In the *Motivation and Language Learning* journal, Wang (2009) points out that in 1983 Harmer classified motivation into two main types: Intrinsic and Extrinsic. Fen and Kiat (2015) mention that Intrinsic motivation happens within the individual and involves the joy of learning a foreign language for its own sake. They also mention that according to Noels (in Fen and Kiat, 2015) there are three types of intrinsic motivation: knowledge, accomplishment and stimulation. The student can feel motivated to learn a foreign language by exploring new ideas and developing knowledge. Accomplishment refers to the attempt to master a task or achieve a goal. Finally, stimulation is based on the excitement of performing a task for fun or appreciation.

On the other hand, there is Extrinsic motivation, which involves the factors outside the individual. Mirhadizadeh (2016) mentions that, according to Brown (2007), external factors can be different in each individual but the common characteristic is that they are based only on circumstances out of the control or influence of the learner. Fen and Kiat (2015) suggest that teachers are one of the most determining external factors of L2 extrinsic motivation, because they influence, engage and guide learners. Nevertheless, they argue that the learners who remain highly motivated often have their own intrinsic motivation for learning rather than just extrinsic factors.

2.7.2 Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation

Gardner (1979) introduced two kinds of motivation: Integrative and Instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is the positive attitude towards the target language group and the potential for integrating into that group. In other words, it is any personal interest in learning a foreign language in order to interact with members whose mother tongue is the target language. Instrumental motivation is a more functional reason to learn a language, for example, to get a better job or get a promotion, and also, to pass an examination. However, according to Wang (2009), all kinds of motivation work in the EFL context and each type contributes to the learners' progress at different levels and in different manners, making it very difficult to say which one is the most effective because they overlap with one another.

2.7.3 Aptitude and Attitude

Language aptitude has been defined as "the capability of learning a task which depends on some combination of more or less enduring characteristics of the learner" (Carrol, 1981. p.84). Rosa (2011) mentions that Kiss and Nikolov defined aptitude based on four assumptions:

- Natural talent for learning languages different from general cognitive abilities
- Aptitude is relatively stable
- It is not a prerequisite for L2 acquisition but a capacity that enhances the rate and ease of learning
- It is composed of different characteristics

Skehan (1986) concluded that language learning aptitude enables the ability and the capacity to handle decontextualized material and these two components are crucial for language learning success.

In Smith's (1971) view, attitude is more like the way people behave around an object or a situation, predisposing the individual to respond in some advantageous manner. That is to say that an attitude is a set of beliefs and motivation is a reason for doing something. According to Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), they are strongly related because students can be motivated to learn a foreign language especially because of their attitude towards the language itself, its culture, or even the teacher. Mirhadizadeh (2016) mentions that the learner's positive or negative attitude towards learning a foreign language has a direct impact on the learning process and this is one of the strongest reasons why the learner should be aware of the background and culture of the foreign language, in order to influence how the learner sees their world and what benefits a foreign language brings to their lives.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the theoretical framework needed in order to understand what issues are involved in the EFL e-learning process, from the definition of each concept, some e-learning models and approaches, the characteristics of learners and teachers who work online and types of motivation and attitudes towards the foreign language, to the factors that other authors have noticed that had affected the e-learning process before.

In the following chapter the methodology followed to carry out this research, the characteristics of the instrument used, the specifications of the setting as well the students who participate in this research will be explained.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter specific information about the methodology and approach used to carry out this research is provided, as well as the setting, subjects and instrument involved. Nardi (2006) states that doing research is an art because it requires skills and intellectual processes that need collaboration, patience and creativity. Since the purpose of this thesis is to explore, identify and list what factors can affect students' learning proficiency in an e-learning EFL course, this research will be based on mixed methodology. The methodology and approaches used in order to gather the necessary data that fulfil the purpose of this research will be described in the following sections.

3.1 Methodology

The approach followed in order to gather the necessary data for this research is a mixed method due to the fact that the principal objective of this research is to list the factors that can affect students' learning proficiency in an e-learning EFL course, but this paper will also try to get to know students' points of view with the purpose of having a better understanding and obtain more complete evidence of the matter. Lund (2012) presents a representative definition given by Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson (2003, p. 212) as follows: "A mixed methods study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, and are given a priority." The increasing interest in combining the two methods is motivated in part by the recognition that L2 teaching and learning are complex. "To uncover this complexity, we need to not only examine how learning takes place in general or what factors affect it, but also provide more in-depth examination and understanding of individual learners and their behaviors and experiences." Nassaji (2015, p.129).

Descriptive methodology is the first path that this research will follow in order to find out which factors affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course. The main goal of Descriptive methodology is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics to finally come up with a list of specific factors. This specific research is concerned with what factors can interfere with the ideal setting for a good e-learning experience. Therefore, observations and survey tools are often used to gather data (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007). Secondly, this research will require quantitative collected data but it will be analyzed qualitatively as well. This will happen by examining the qualitative data thoroughly to find relevant points or ideas and convert them into numerical data for further comparison and evaluation. At the same time, it will gain a deeper understanding of individual opinions, perspectives and attitudes.

3.2 Context

Ramirez and Pamplón (2012) mention that Stern (1983) stated that there is a distinction between foreign language and second language in terms of language functions, environment, learning purposes and methods. From his point of view, foreign language refers to a language used outside the country with the purpose of tourism, communication with a foreign native speaker, reading foreign texts, and so on. On the other hand, second language refers to a language that has the same importance as the mother tongue of a country. Some other authors have given their definitions and argued the differences between these two concepts. According to Peng (2019), Iwai (2011) defined EFL as learning English in a non-English speaking country, while ESL learners are those who learn English where it is formally spoken. Dingfang (in Peng, 2019) differentiated between foreign language and second language according to the environment, language input and even affective factors that influence the learning process. Specifically, regarding the already mentioned definitions, in Mexico English is learnt as a foreign language.

A research article titled *English in Mexico: An examination of policy, perceptions and influencing factors*, published by The British Council (Figure 6. "Per Management", 2015, p.24), shows data provided by SEP in relation to the management of English Educational

Services. It shows that 71.5% of students attend schools managed by the state government; 10.3% constitute the percentage of students who attended services managed by the federal government; while autonomous institutions, mainly universities, manage 4.7% of schools, mainly in upper-secondary and tertiary education. Therefore, only 13.5% of students attend private schools.

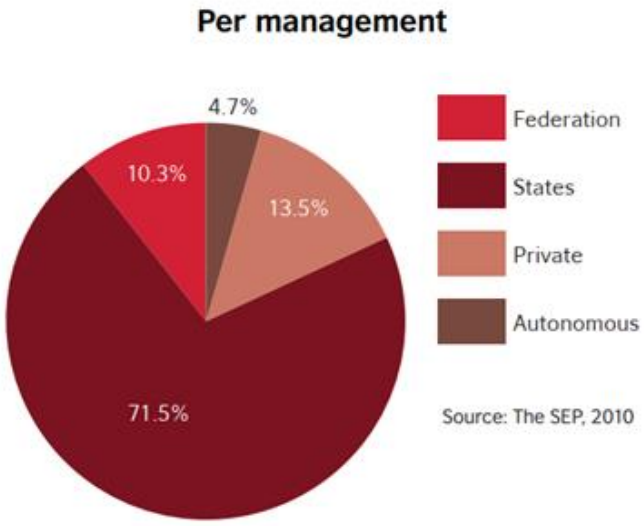


Figure 6. "Per Management". The British Council, 2015.

According to datareportal.com (2021), in January 2021 Mexico had a population of 129.6 million. In terms of internet access there are 92.01 million internet users and this number had an increase of +4.0% (3.5 million) between 2020 and 2021. There were 115.4 million mobile connections in Mexico in January 2021. However, the number of mobile connections in Mexico decreased by 407 thousand (-0.4%) between January 2020 and January 2021. The number of mobile connections in Mexico in January 2021 was equivalent to 89.1% of the total population.

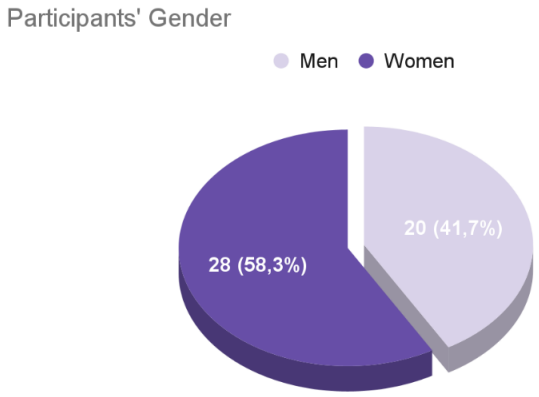
Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Lingo Centre language school has offered EFL courses online since May 2020. This language school is located in Jardines de San Manuel in Puebla de los Ángeles city, Mexico. In the past it was called "Centro de Idiomas Garham" and it was founded in 2008 with the idea of giving private English and French classes to people of all ages and levels. In 2012 this school officially became a Cambridge Certification

Centre and began to offer preparation courses for Cambridge certifications. After some years it changed its name to Lingo Centre with a commitment to maximizing students' linguistic abilities and academic potential through specific language training and study support.

3.3 Participants

Students who participate in this research are going to be described in the following paragraphs. The description includes their gender, age, the state where they live, their education level, the number of hours they have online English classes in a week and the materials and electronic tools that they use in their online English classes.

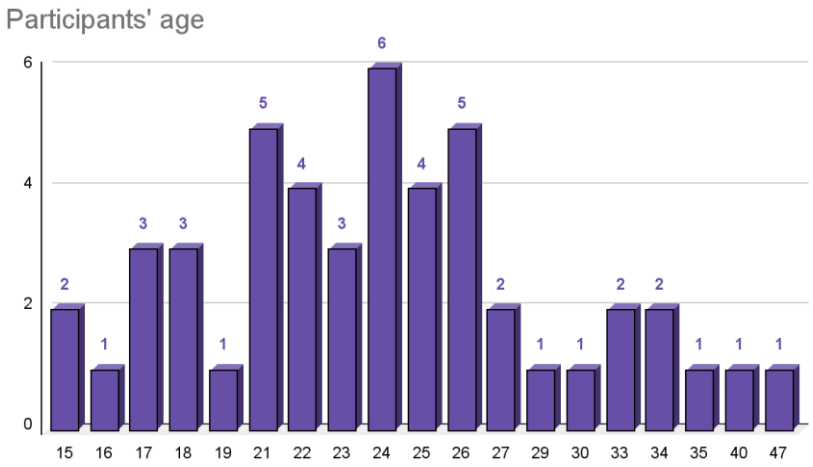
Forty-eight out of ninety students from the aforementioned institution were selected to participate in this research. 58% of them are female and 42% are male (See Graph 1).



Graph 1. Participants' gender

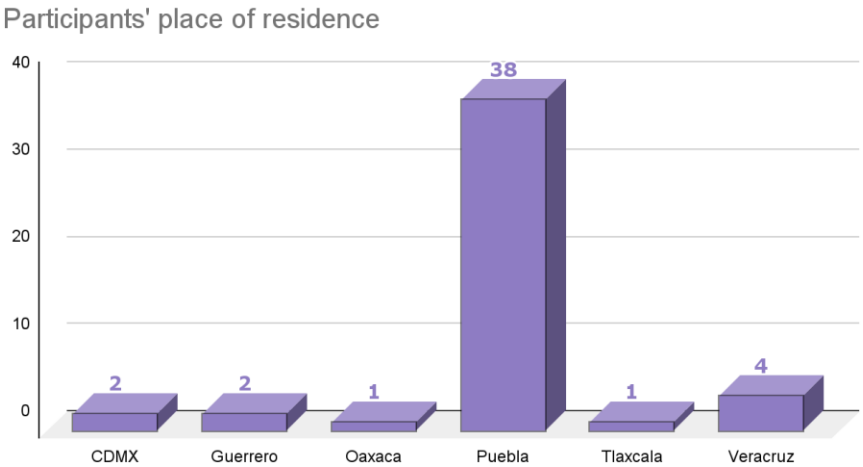
Students' ages range from 15 to 47 years old. As can be observed in the following graph (Graph 2), most of the students who participate in this research are from twenty-one to twenty-six years old, making a total of twenty-seven participants. Six participants' ages are between seventeen and eighteen years old. Twenty-seven, thirty-three and thirty-four years old have two participants in each age group. The youngest participants are two of

fifteen years old. The minority of students are those that, as it can be observed in the graph, only have one participant: sixteen, nineteen, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-five, forty and forty-seven years old.



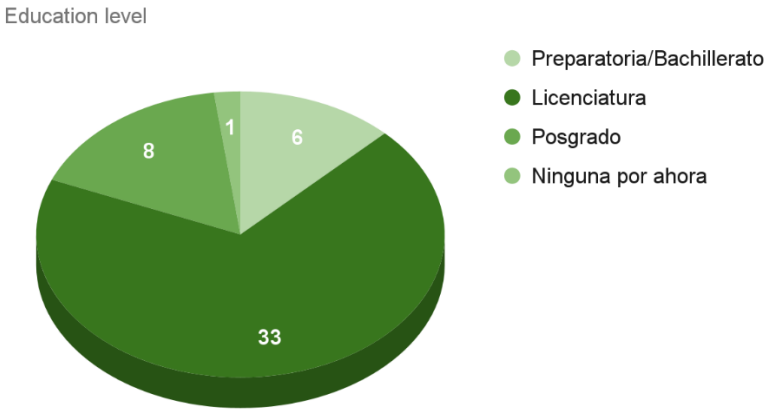
Graph 2. Participants' age

The participants live in different states in Mexico. Thirty-eight participants in this study live in Puebla state, while four are in Veracruz, two participants are in Mexico City (CDMX), and two more are in Guerrero. Finally, two participants belong to other states: one from Oaxaca and the other one from Tlaxcala (See Graph 3). As previously mentioned, there are a total of forty-eight students.



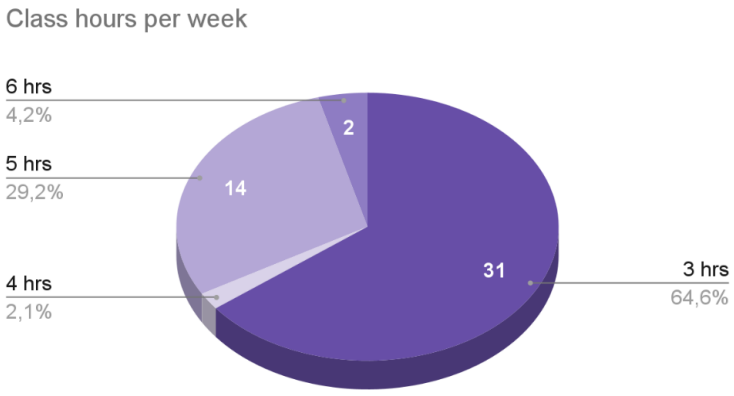
Graph 3. Participants' place of residence

The subjects' education level is between Highschool and Masters' Degree (graph 4). Thirty-three of the students who participated in the application of the instrument for this research have a bachelor's degree, eight of them have a postgraduate study level, only six of the students are studying high school and one of them was not studying at the time of answering the questionnaire.



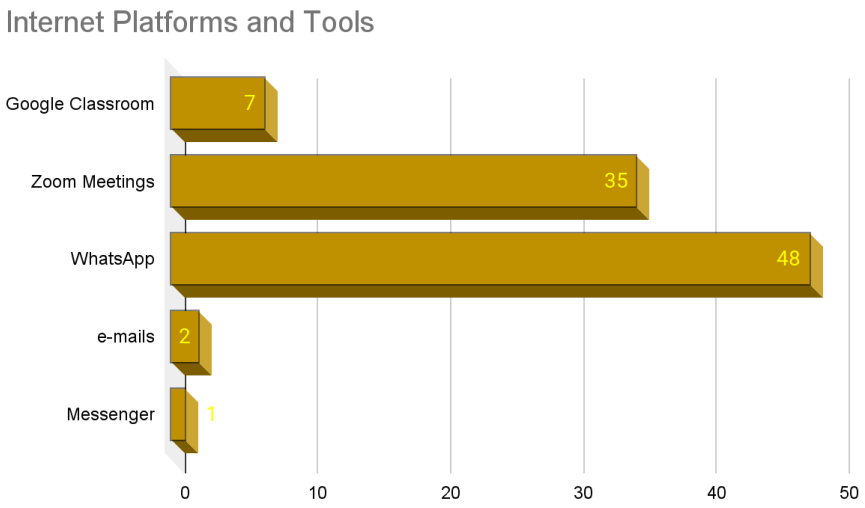
Graph 4. Education level

The subjects take online classes at the Lingo Centre in a variety of scheduled class programs. Thirty-one of the students, the majority, take a three-hour per week course. Fourteen students are taking a five-hour per week course, two students were taking six hours class per week and only one student was taking four hours a week course (graph 5). These students are between A1, A2 and B1 English language levels.



Graph 5. Class hours per week

The participants connect with their teacher in different ways, depending on their means, through a combination of platforms and internet communication tools such as Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom meetings and emails. In order to have a better understanding of the online classes' setting, Graph 6 illustrates the number of students who use them. All of the students have communication in some way through the WhatsApp messaging service. Thirty-five students use Zoom video calls to take their online classes. Two of them have used e-mails to send and receive materials and only one has used the Messenger service.



Graph 6. Internet Platforms and Tools

In addition, the subjects were asked about the available materials they have at home to take their EFL online classes. In order to have a better understanding of their specific settings, graph 7 shows that all students have an internet connection and forty-five of them have a computer or a smartphone to work on. Forty-four students have a notebook to take notes. Thirty-nine students take their online classes in a special suitable place. Thirty-seven have a microphone for speaking activities. Thirty-three have a text book to work with and finally, twenty-nine students have a webcam and a printer to assist their online classes.

Graph 7. Materials for online classes

3.4 Instrument

In order to collect the data to support this research, a survey was used. Glasow (2005) said that Pinsonneault and Kraemer (1993) defined a survey as a "means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people" (p. 77). This research methodology consists of collecting information by using questionnaires and interviews. Due to the current situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a single questionnaire, designed in Google Forms, was sent to the subjects with the purpose of finding what factors affect their EFL e-learning process. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher, who designed each question carefully, based on the information retrieved along Chapter II of the present research. Some of the questions were open so the subject could express their opinions or thoughts; some other items were closed questions so specific options to choose were given and there were also some items in which the subject could choose more than one option, all of them according to their specific situation.

The questionnaire was divided into four different parts:

The first section briefly provided the purpose of the questionnaire. The second section was the background context with the main explanation in order to complete the questionnaire. The first seven questions were designed in order to gather some factual information such as educational level, age, number of online English hours they have a week, and also information about the electronic tools and materials that students used when taking the EFL online course (see Appendix 1).

The third section asked about external factors that affect students' performance when taking an online EFL course. The first and second questions were asked in order to find if the students had problems with the use of the mentioned tools. The third question was also a multiple choice one, in which students were asked about environmental factors that got their attention during their EFL e-learning classes. The fourth question was a closed one. It was asked in order to know if the students believe environmental factors affected their performance during online classes. Due to the fact that external motivation can be given by the teacher, the fifth question was closed and asked if the students felt the teacher-student's interaction was good, acceptable or poor. Finally, questions six and seven were open multiple choice and they asked what the strong and weak features the students found in the EFL e-learning course (See Appendix 2).

Finally, in the fourth section, the students were asked about internal factors that affect their EFL e-learning. The first question was designed in order to know if the students felt motivated to learn EFL at the moment of answering the instrument. The second question asked about students' main motivation in learning EFL online. The third question was about their beliefs about the language, if it is easy or difficult to learn for them. The fourth question was open and it asked what the reason was for quitting an EFL course before. The fifth question asked which factors they consider to be important when learning EFL; it involved motivation, age, aptitude and attitude. Finally, the sixth question was asked in order to know which factors/issues discourage their EFL e-learning. Finally, a thank you phrase was written with the purpose of showing gratitude for their participation (See Appendix 3).

3.5 Overall Research Design

Once the instrument was designed and ready to be shared, the researcher proceeded to undertake its data collection procedure. During one week, from September 6th to 12th, the researcher asked the students to answer the questionnaire voluntarily in order to know their opinions about the EFL e-learning course at Lingo Centre. As soon as the students agreed, the researcher shared a link that redirected the students to the questionnaire via WhatsApp. Participants started to answer the questionnaire on September 7th and the last answer was received on September 15th. To sum up, nine days were spent to finish the data collection process.

3.6 Data Analysis

Once the instrument was answered by all the participants in this research, the process for carrying out the Data Analysis was actually not difficult. Due to the fact that the instrument was already divided into four sections, the results will be explained in that same order. The results obtained in the first two sections were used to gather information about the context of this research and were explained in the *Participants'* section. Google Forms delivers graphical results so the researcher chose and categorized students' answers in order to find a pattern in each item. For the open question items, the researcher carefully analyzed the answers one by one, taking note of the main idea in order to categorize the results into quantitative ones. If the results were divided into different opinions or facts, a pie graph was designed in order to show the percentage of participants who expressed different opinions. On the other hand, if the item gave more than one option to choose, a bar graph was designed in order to know how many participants chose different options.

3.7 Conclusion

The main purpose of Chapter III was to describe the whole research structure. First of all, the methodology used was described in the first section. Specifically, it was based on the mixed method due to the fact that the principal objective of this research is to enumerate factors that can affect students' learning proficiency in an e-learning EFL course

but also because this research has to have qualitative data in order to know students' points of view with the purpose of having a better understanding of the matter. Later, the specific information about the general setting in which this research was made, the participants' backgrounds, national and local context of the EFL e-learning and the explanation of the making of the instrument and its application procedure are described in this chapter. In the following section, the results obtained from the analysis of participants' answers will be described with the objective of finally enumerating and generating the specific and general results of this research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the questionnaire applied to forty-eight students who were taking an e-learning EFL course at the Lingo Centre school are presented. Specific conclusions about the results, the boundaries and the factors that affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course are provided. For the best organization, the results were divided in two parts. The first part shows the results from the *External Factors* questions with the help of a pie or bar graph, followed by the second part, in which the answers from the *Internal Factors* that can affect students' performance when taking an EFL online course, are shown in a pie or bar graph as well. Each graph has an explanation about the theoretical point that it is supporting or demonstrating. Then, each item will have a very detailed explanation of the results obtained. Finally, the answers for each *Research Question* that this research aims to answer will be explained.

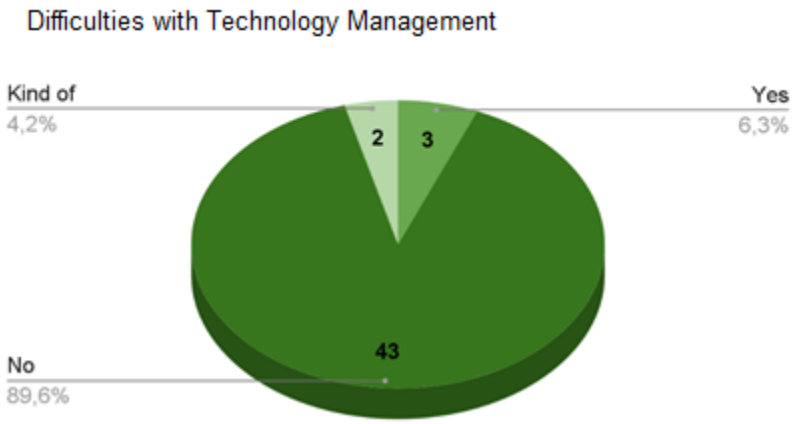
4.1 Results Obtained

The answers obtained from the forty-eight students who were taking an EFL online course in the Lingo Centre are be presented and analyzed in this section. The factors that affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course are divided into two: External and Internal.

4.1.1 External Factors

According to Clark (1994), technologies are merely vehicles that deliver instruction and they do not influence students' achievement. With the purpose of knowing if the management of platforms and internet applications influences the students' performance, it is important to know how the students manage the use of technology. Therefore, students were asked if they faced any difficulty when using the software for their EFL online classes. They had three choices: "Sí" (yes), "No" and "Un poco" (a little). 89.6% of the

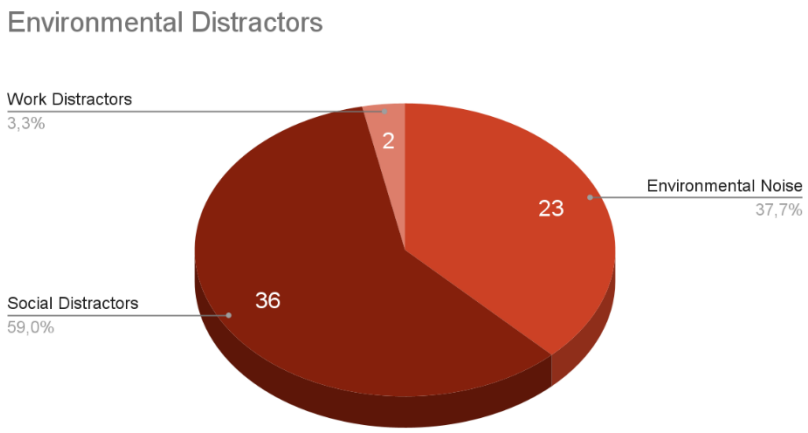
students did not face any difficulty when using technology in their EFL class; this represents forty-three participants out of forty-eight. 6.3% faced difficulties and only 4.2% answered that they had some difficulties using electronic technology; they represent five participants out of the forty-eight that answered the questionnaire. Bonk and Reynolds (1997) claimed that "it is the instructional strategy, not the technology, that influences the quality of learning" (in Ally n.d. p.2). Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the participants have no difficulties when using technology when taking their EFL classes in the Lingo Centre (See Graph 8).



Graph 8. Difficulties with Technology Management

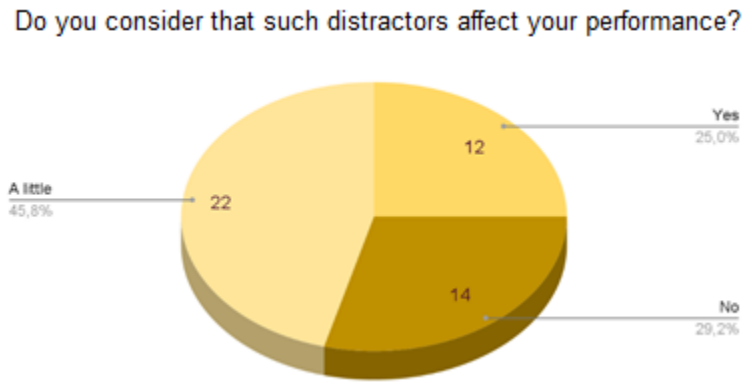
According to Guijosa (2019) "in the comfort of home, online students are more likely to send text messages, answer emails, chat on Facebook or WhatsApp, watch videos, surf on Google or listen to music while taking an online course, compared to a teacher-supervised class" (para. 2). Particularly, in the next question, some environmental factors were mentioned in order to know if the subject had experienced these kinds of interruptions during their EFL online classes. This question was divided into three different external factors: Environmental noise such as music, TV noise or noise coming from outside; Social Distractors such as social media notifications; and family interruptions. Graph 9 shows that 59% of students experienced Social Distractors, which makes thirty-six of them; 37.7% were distracted by external noise, which means twenty-three students; and only

3.3% had to pay attention to some job issues at the same time - they were only two out of forty-eight students.



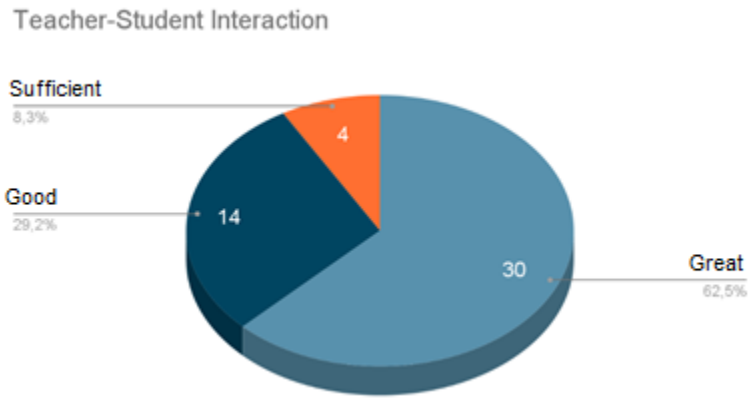
Graph 9. Environmental Distractors

Guijosa (2019) also mentions that a study conducted by researchers at Kent State University confirmed that online students who had multitasking tendencies while in their online classes scored lower in academic tests, compared to their performance in face-to-face courses. The next question was asked in order to know if those Environmental Distractors influenced the students' performance when taking an EFL online course at the Lingo Centre. The students' answers were as follows: 45.8% (twenty-two students) agreed that these distractors can influence their performance; twenty-five percent definitely agreed that these distractors influence their performance - this represents twelve students out of forty-eight; finally, 29.2% definitely disagreed with the fact that Environmental Distractors affect their performance when taking an EFL online course - they were fourteen students. According to the same author, this multitasking behavior and distractions can undermine the effectiveness of online courses (See Graph 10).



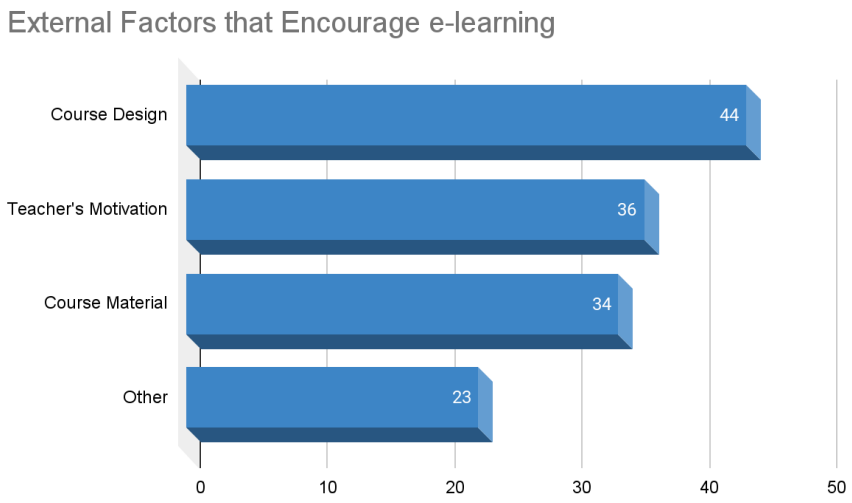
Graph 10. Do you consider that such distractors affect your performance?

One of the most popular e-learning models is the *Community of Inquiry* model, developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). This model postulates three main *processes* (mentioned in chapter II): *cognitive presence, social presence* and *teaching presence.* Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer (2001) proposed three critical features that a teacher performs in the e-learning process: first, the design and organization of the e-learning experience; second, the implementation of e-learning activities to encourage discourse between students; and third, the teacher's role goes beyond moderating the learning experience when the teacher adds subject-matter expertise through a variety of forms. Therefore, a fundamental source of external motivation is provided by the teacher. The next item concerned the fact that lack of interaction affects students' performance. For this reason, this item focused on whether the students experienced feelings of isolation during their EFL online course. The results in Graph 11 show that 62.5% (thirty students) felt that the amount of interaction was great; 29.2% (fourteen students) said that it was good; 8.3% (four students) said it was enough, and none of them mentioned a poor level of interaction.



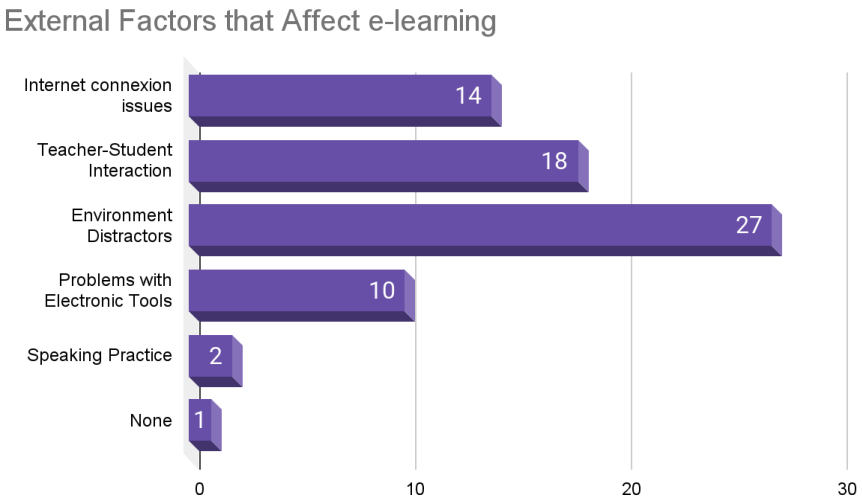
Graph 11. Teacher-Student Interaction.

Taking into account Schramm's (1977) suggestion that "learning is more influenced by the content and instructional strategy, rather than by the type of technology used to deliver instructions" (in Ally, n.d. p.1) and with the intention of knowing the different extrinsic factors that encourage better student performance in the e-learning English context, the next two items were designed in order to find which features encouraged and discouraged students' external motivation. The first question is about which features were considered ideal when taking an e-learning EFL course at the Lingo Centre. The results shown in Graph 12 demonstrated that forty-four out of forty-eight students considered that the course design was a feature that encourages students' e-learning the most. Thirty-six out of forty-eight students believed that the teacher's motivation is also an essential feature in the e-learning English process. Thirty-four students also agreed with the fact that the course material is a key element in an e-learning EFL course. Finally, twenty-three students mentioned other external factors such as family pressure and work or academic reasons.



Graph 12. External Factors that Encourage e-learning.

Speaking about discouraging external factors that affect students' performance in an EFL online course, Rossett (2002) claims that online learning has great potential but it takes commitment and resources, and also must be done right. This means that e-learning materials must be designed properly, with adequate support and a focus on learners and e-learning. The following item in the survey was designed in order to know which external factors affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course at the Lingo Centre. The results in Graph 13 showed that twenty-seven out of forty-eight students said that the strongest discouraging external factor is environmental distractors. Eighteen students said that teacher-student interaction was also a fundamental factor that affected students' performance. Fourteen students stated that another important factor was internet connection issues. These are the three main external factors that discourage motivation in the EFL e-learning. It is worth mentioning that ten students, who said that *problems with electronic tools* can be an important factor that affected their performance, also mentioned that they overcame those problems during the course. On the other hand, two of the students said that *speaking practice* affected their performance during the process, but they also mentioned that it was because they need to practice more. Finally, only one student said that there is no external factor that could affect their performance when taking the e-learning EFL course at the Lingo Centre.

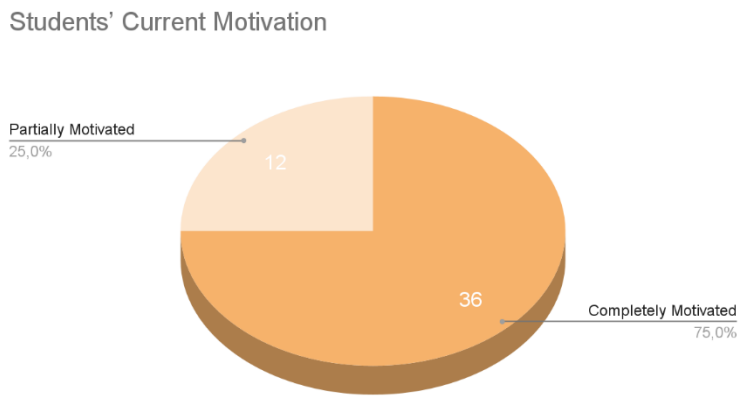


Graph 13. External Factors that Affect e-learning.

4.1.2 Internal Factors

Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) claimed that motivation, attitude and the set of beliefs about learning the language are among the determining factors that can influence students' efficiency in language classes. The same authors stated that motivation plays an important role in the process of language learning and it is related to a person's intrinsic goals and desires. Successful language learning is linked to the learners' passion and this is the main reason why teachers should find ways to connect to this passion.

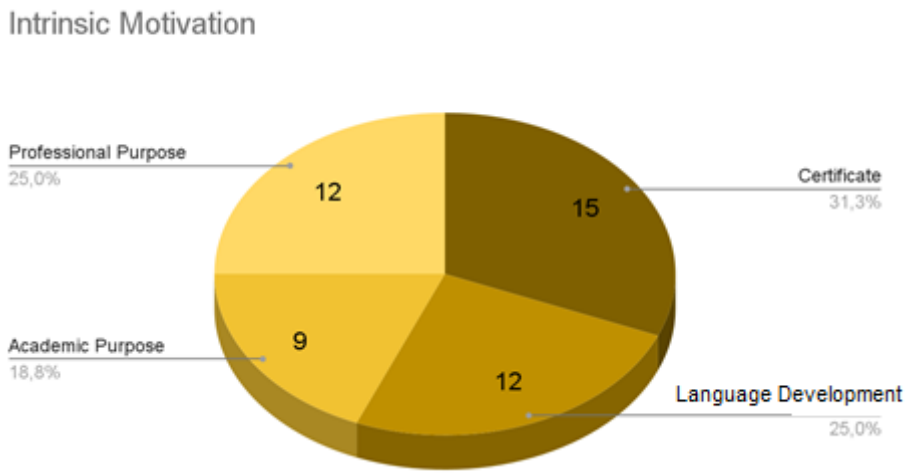
This section will show internal factors that can affect students' performance in an EFL e-learning course. The first item dealt with motivation. It was designed in order to know if the students felt motivated at that precise moment in the e-learning EFL course at the Lingo Centre. In Graph 14, the results showed that 75% of the students were highly motivated, which represents thirty-six out of forty-eight students. Only 25% were partially motivated; these are twelve out of forty-eight students. Fortunately, none of them were unmotivated at all.



Graph 14. Students' Current Motivation.

The second item was an open question, designed with the purpose of knowing students' intrinsic motivation for learning English as a foreign language online. According to Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), this is especially significant because students have different reasons for studying a foreign language and it is important for teachers to identify students' purposes and needs in order to develop proper motivation strategies. On the other hand, students need to decide how long they must sustain an activity, how hard they should pursue it and how motivated they feel about their pursuits.

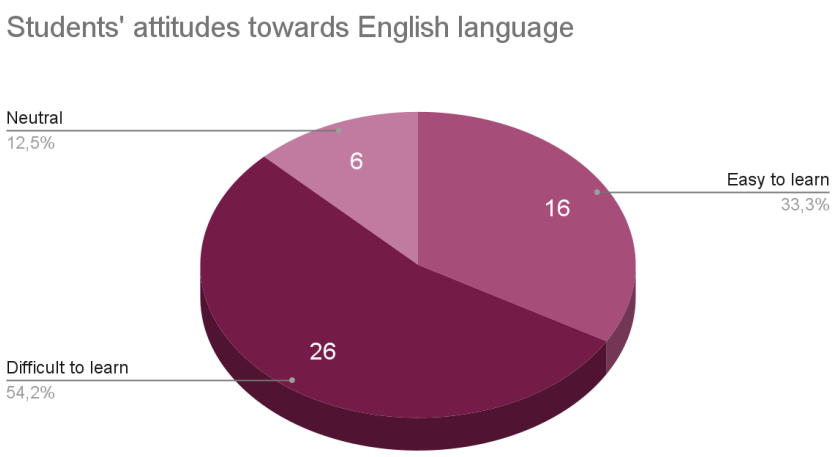
In order to find out students' intrinsic motivation, the researcher classified the answers in order to have a final quantitative answer, which is shown in the following graph. Fifteen students said that they wanted to obtain an official qualification as a main goal; this represents 31.3%. The second intrinsic motivation was a tie between *Professional Purpose*, which means that they needed to be skillful in the English language because they wanted to get promoted or they were looking for a better job; and *Language Development*, which means that students just wanted to improve their English language skills. Each answer totaled 25% of the result, which represents a total of twenty-four out of forty-eight students. Finally, 18.8% mentioned *Academic Purpose* as their main intrinsic motivation, which means that these nine students needed to improve their English skills in order to study a masters' degree or to start their degree procedure (See Graph 15).



Graph 15. Intrinsic Motivation.

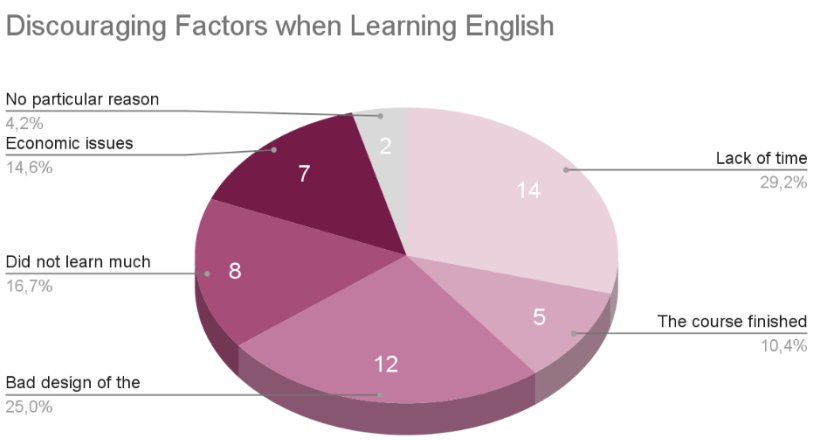
To most authors the word attitude is associated with the students' intrinsic motivation towards the English language. After all, it is the students' good or poor attitude that makes for easy or difficult progress in the foreign language e-learning class. According to Latchanna and Dagnew, "attitude is accepted as an important concept to understand human behavior and is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and feelings" (2009, p. 1). These beliefs about language learning are directly associated with success in language classes.

The third item from this section asked about the students' attitude towards e-learning English as a foreign language. The results showed that 54.2% (twenty-six students) believe that learning English is difficult, then 33.3% percent (sixteen students) believe that learning English is easy and 12.5%, representing only six students out of forty-eight, said it was neutral for them. It is important to mention that some of the students who said that learning English as a foreign language is difficult also said that it depends on the commitment and effort that students make when learning the language. On the other hand, the students who said that English was an easy language to learn also stated that they enjoy learning it whatever the method. The remaining twelve percent that kept a neutral position argued that they needed to know the language, so it did not matter for them if it was easy or difficult (See Graph 16).



Graph 16. Students' attitude towards English Language Learning

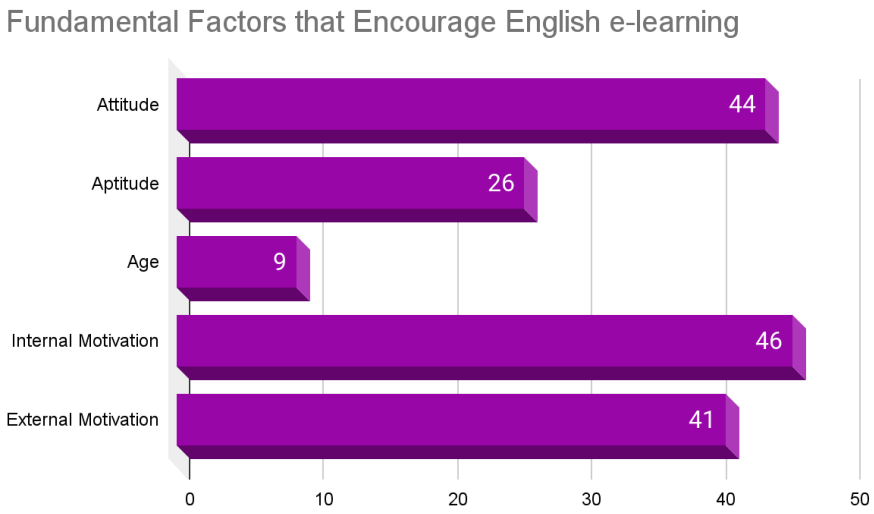
The fourth item was designed in order to find which factors have discouraged students from learning English and have directly affected their performance in their online classes. According to Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), a study made by Naiman et al. (1978) has shown that even brilliant and talented students with poor attitude and low motivation have achieved little progress in learning a foreign language and came to the conclusion that the most successful learners are not always those to whom learning a foreign language comes easily. This is why the researcher asked the subjects about discouraging factors that affected the students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course at Lingo Centre. In Graph 17, the results showed that 29.2%, fourteen students, said they did not manage their time well enough, making it difficult to complete some tasks or making them achieve little progress in their learning. 25% (twelve students) said that it was because of the poor design of the course. Some students said that this makes them feel unmotivated to continue their studies. 16.7% (eight students) mention that they did not learn much. 14.6% (seven students) mentioned economic issues. 10.4% (five students) said that the course finished and finally 4.2% (two students) mentioned that they did not have a particular reason at all.



Graph 17. Discouraging Factors when e-learning English

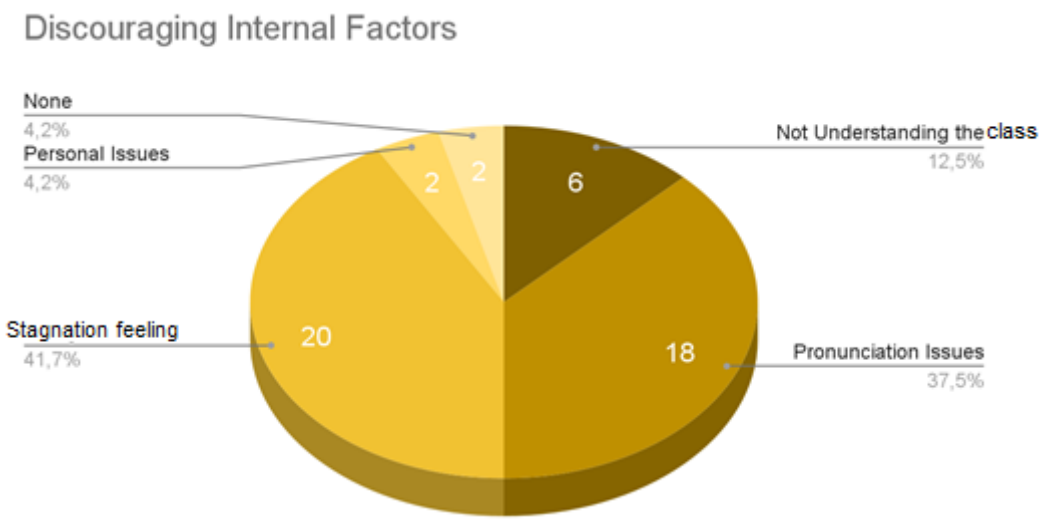
Naiman et al. (1978) concluded that successful foreign language learners are those who display some typical characteristics, most of them associated with motivation and attitude, such as: positive tasks orientation, ego involvement, need for achievement, high aspirations, goal orientation, perseverance and tolerance.

Miller (n.d.) states that although some learners "pick up" language skills faster than others, this does not mean that the ability to learn a foreign language is an attribute possessed by a few "lucky" people. This author argues that there are many internal and external factors that influence how well students learn a new language, such as motivation, family support, prior linguistic knowledge, learning environment, teaching strategies, comprehensible input, age, students' personality and comfort with the language. The next item was designed in order to find out what the fundamental features are that students think necessary in order to succeed when learning English as a foreign language online. Forty-six students said that internal motivation is the most important factor that influences their performance in e-learning EFL. Forty-four students said that attitude is also an important part in e-learning EFL. Forty-one students argued that external motivation is important in e-learning EFL. Twenty-six students agreed that aptitude is another important feature and finally only nine students mentioned age as a factor that can encourage motivation when e-learning EFL (See Graph 18).



Graph 18. Fundamental Factors that Encourage English e-learning.

One of Naiman's (1978) study's implications was that neglect of internal motivational factors can trouble students in language learning, so the teachers should handle the techniques and strategies in their classes in a way that can immerse students in language learning. Therefore, the last item was designed in order to know what internal factors affect the learners' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course. The results showed that 41.7% (twenty students) said that the feeling of stagnation of their EFL skills development is the strongest factor. 37.5% (eighteen students) agreed that pronunciation issues were an important factor as well. 12.5% (six students) mentioned that not understanding the class was another determining factor. 4.2% (two students) mentioned that personal issues affected their performance. Finally, another 4.2% (two students) said that none of the internal factors affected their performance (Graph 19).



Graph 19. Discouraging Internal Factors that affect students' performance.

4.2 Answers to Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to find factors that affect the participants' performance when they learn EFL through an e-learning course at Lingo Centre. After analyzing the subject's responses, the following section will enumerate the aforementioned factors.

What are the factors that affect participants' performance when they learn EFL through e-learning? / Are these factors mainly external or internal?

The factors that affect students' performance when taking an EFL e-learning course can be both **internal** and **external**. As stated by Mirhadizadeh (2016), learners' motivation may come from both sides and in most cases, one influences the other. This means that whenever one type of motivation is affected, the learner can benefit from others. The results show that most of the factors that affect students' performance are particularly external factors such as environmental interruptions (45.8%) and social interruptions (70.8%). In addition, other kinds of external factors that encourage e-learners to continue or even finish an e-learning English course are the teacher's attitude (58.3%) and the course design (87.5%). Mirhadizadeh also mentions that learners think that success should be

rewarded, so they do their best in order to achieve it; on the other hand, teachers should use such motivational tasks and activities in order to keep up their students' level of motivation.

Internal factors are important as well. The internal *desire* to improve English knowledge, to obtain a qualification or to have better job opportunities (31%) can motivate students to take an e-learning EFL course. Some intrinsic situations that can discourage students from starting or continuing to learn English as a foreign language are the difficulties that students face when learning a foreign language (41.7%), making them feel stuck in the process and often making them quit the course. Mirhadizadeh (2016) claimed that while success in language learning depends on the learner himself, who must have a sort of autonomy, real interest in learning and strong motivation for the subject, the role of the teacher is of the utmost importance when offering well designed resources in order to make them higher achievers. Furthermore, their success in the process of language learning can be achieved through teachers' awareness.

What are the main problems caused by the identified factors that affect participants' EFL learning?

As shown by Brown (2007), extrinsic motivation can become intrinsic, as is shown in the following table taken from Mirhadizadeh (2016): *Internal and External Factors in Language Learning* (Figure 7).

Table 1. *Fromextrinsic to intrinsic motivation in educational institutions (Brown, 2007)*

External	Internal	Results
School Curriculum	leaner-centered, personal goal setting, individualization	self-esteem, self-actualization decide for self
Parental expectations	family valuesacceptance, respectfor wisdom	love, intimacy
Society's Expectations	security for comfortable, routines task-based teaching	community, belonging, identity, harmony, security
Tests & Exams	peer evaluation Self-diagnosis Level-check exercises	experience self-knowledge
Immediate Certification	long-term goals, The big picture "things take time"	self-actualization
Make Money!	Content-based teaching, ESP vocational education workplace ESL	Cooperation, harmony
Competition	cooperative learning Group work, the class is a team	manipulations, strength, status, security
Never Fail	risk-taking, innovation, creativity	learn from mistakes,nobody's perfect, "c'est la vie"

Figure 7. Internal and External Factors in Language Learning (taken from Brown 2007 in Mirhadizadeh, 2016, p. 195)

According to the results from the applied questionnaire, Factors that affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course, factors can be internal and external. These factors can lead to difficulties and problems for students which can affect their performance. In the following table the external and internal factors are shown as well as the problems that such factors cause when taking an EFL e-learning course at Lingo Centre.

Internal Factors	Problems caused	External Factors	Problems caused
Students' difficulties in understanding the language	Feelings of Anxiety/Frustration	Environmental interruptions	Difficulties in understanding an activity or topic
Poor technological skills	Feelings of Anxiety/Frustration	Work interruptions	Disruption in the learning process
		Multitasking	Poor time management
		Unplanned/Badly planned online courses	Decreases interest and motivation
		Internet connectivity issues	Feelings of Anxiey/Frustration

Among the internal factors that affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course at Lingo Centre, the feeling of anxiety that students experienced whenever they felt unable to complete a speaking or listening task was the most mentioned, followed by some problems in understanding the topics of the e-learning class and finally poor technological skills.

The external factors that affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course at Lingo Centre can cause some problems, such as environmental interruptions like internet notifications, external noise and family interruptions, which were the most common. Interruptions from work and bad time management were the second problematic issues that affected students' e-learning performance. Another important factor mentioned was badly planned online courses. Students argued that they felt "stuck" in their foreign language learning, making them feel unmotivated to continue learning. Finally, some internet connection issues were mentioned as a factor that caused problems for students' performance.

4.3 Discussion

After analyzing and categorizing the subject's responses, the results obtained from this study have clarified that external and internal factors indeed play an important role in influencing students' performance. Therefore, from the information shown here it is clear that the underlying motivation provided by the teacher and the attitude provided by the students are highly instrumental. During the analyzing process, the researcher also found that internal factors can provide intrinsic motivation that encourages students to start or retake English as a foreign language by e-learning. The results of a study made by Lei (2007) highlighted that teachers influence students' interest, motivation and attitude towards EFL learning. The teachers' positive influence enhances students' language proficiency and the teachers' sensitivity and skills could also be the key to foreign language learning success.

Nevertheless, some external factors can discourage students' extrinsic motivation, making them feel unable to finish a course or causing them to stop learning the foreign

language, at least for a while. According to Ilter (2009), although EFL students are attracted to technology and it also increases their motivation at the beginning and technological-based classrooms may be good solutions for unmotivated students, it can also be boring and sometimes frustrating after a time. This is the main reason for selecting material according to students' needs and interests.

4.4 Conclusion

The main purpose of chapter IV was to demonstrate the results obtained from the instrument applied in this research. In the first part the responses were divided into external and internal factors. Each item was explained and analyzed in order to find and categorize the factors that affect students' performance when taking an EFL e-learning course in the Lingo Centre. After explaining each item, the research questions made at the beginning of this research were answered. At the same time these factors were enumerated in order of importance and the implications of each one were mentioned. Finally, the discussion section argued that this research found that internal factors provide students with motivation to start or retake English as a foreign language, while on the other hand, some external factors can discourage students from continuing to learn English as a foreign language or actually make them quit a language course. Finally, in the following chapter the conclusions and contributions as well as the limitations of this study are presented.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

In the present chapter the concluding ideas will be presented by outlining the research contributions of this study. Some suggestions in order to maximize the effectiveness of teaching EFL online will also be described in this chapter, as well as some limitations of this research. It is concluded that other than the skills of foreign language learners there are other factors that can influence the efficiency of learners. Once the research questions have been answered, this study can also explain what research contributions are provided with the final analysis of the results.

5.1 Research Contributions

The context of online learning is still very variable as the technologies, platforms and teaching tools are evolving rapidly. According to Koper (2001), the social construction and annotation of content by learners, teachers and practitioners, and the formal expression of learning interactions are creating a second-generation web that provides new capabilities and challenges for online teachers and learners. However, the fundamental components of teaching and learning in any context are the teaching presence, the person who designs and organizes the class; the texts, materials and tools provided; and students' attitude and intrinsic motivation. Focusing on online teachers, we can conclude that they must have excellent language knowledge, technological skills and also pedagogical and andragogical competences. By reviewing the results obtained from this research, institutions can check what they need to have before asking teachers to design an online course. Nevertheless, students should also be aware of their own skills and capabilities in order to start studying online because, unlike traditional classes, students have to bring out their best in order to succeed in an online language course.

According to the findings of this research, we come to the conclusion that other than the skills of language learners there are other factors, such as motivation and attitude, which can influence the efficiency of language learners. The findings of the study show that there is a direct relationship between the efficiency of the students in language classes, and motivation and attitude. Aydin states that " In a general sense, … demotivation constitutes a barrier for a [sic] continuing, improving, interesting and enjoyable teaching and learning" (2012, p. 9). The study recommends some strategies for teachers which can be very effective to increase language learners' external motivation and to create a good attitude among the students towards language learning. Another important contribution for e-learners is that they can help themselves achieve their goals by determining their own language needs and by defining why they want to learn the language. Language learners can achieve success by setting their own goals and by directing their studies towards their own expectations. Having goals and expectations leads to increased motivation, which in turn, leads to a higher level of language competence. Mirhadizadeh states that learning is a challenging task in which teachers "need to be aware of all the factors that exist inside every individual by considering all the differences they each have as well as the effect of external factors." (2016, p.196). Instructors and institutions may be the most important factor in influencing students' motivation, which is a key element in the e-learning EFL process.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The present research intended to find what factors affect students' performance when taking an e-learning course at Lingo Centre, which is a language school in Puebla city, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the results from this research show the specific internal and external factors that can affect students' performance when taking an e-learning EFL course, there are some special limitations that can differentiate this work from others. Some of these limitations are: the institution, the students' context and the syllabus used in this specific language e-learning course. This study involved only English learners who were taking an online course at Lingo Centre and the results may not reflect some other factors that could affect other kinds of language learners, such as those who are

learning a different language or with another teacher at the same school, or those who learn in a different institution and even in a different state of the Mexican Republic.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The results of this research were obtained in order to find what factors can affect students' performance when taking an online EFL class. Although these results can be useful for further research on online learning, it is clear that focusing on the syllabus and design of an online English course is necessary, taking into account all the factors that affect and encourage students. In regard to external factors, it could be interesting to make a study about the students' circumstances when taking classes in order to know if they are relevant when learning online, as well as multitasking activities and how much they affect students while taking online classes. On the other hand, most successful language learners have to develop their own strategies to learn more effectively. Strategies that enhance successful language learning may be the most important and interesting topic for further research.

5.4 Reflection

After finishing this research, I found that we, as language teaching professionals, must be aware of our personal mistakes in order to examine and evaluate our teaching to make decisions about necessary changes to improve attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices. This thesis examined the roots and evolution of online foreign language learning. Added to this, this research addresses the need to implement effective English online courses in order to improve and give good quality classes. At the end of this work, I found that there is always a need to be up to date, but sometimes it is difficult for people who work as freelancers as we do in Lingo Centre. It is difficult to compete with large institutions because we do not have the funds to support or improve our tools, making it difficult to offer the same standard of teaching. However, it is now known that the most important feature in teaching any foreign language online is the teacher's attitude and willingness to support their students and that can be our most important characteristic.

Personally, carrying out this research was a little difficult because I had not practiced academic writing for many years and it was difficult to start again. I thought I was not going to be capable of completing a thesis but as time passed I realized that I have improved my writing skills a lot and the most important fact is that I can use this research to improve my teaching, which is of paramount importance for me.

5.5 Conclusion

Learning and teaching online can be a great tool or way to learn EFL. However, this paper concludes that EFL teachers need to be aware of the different factors that play an important role in the teaching-learning process in order to take advantage of the theoretical framework and tools available for their online classrooms. Additionally, EFL e-learning students should be aware of their best qualities and skills in order to increase or keep up their motivation. By exploiting all these features, EFL e-learning can achieve success.

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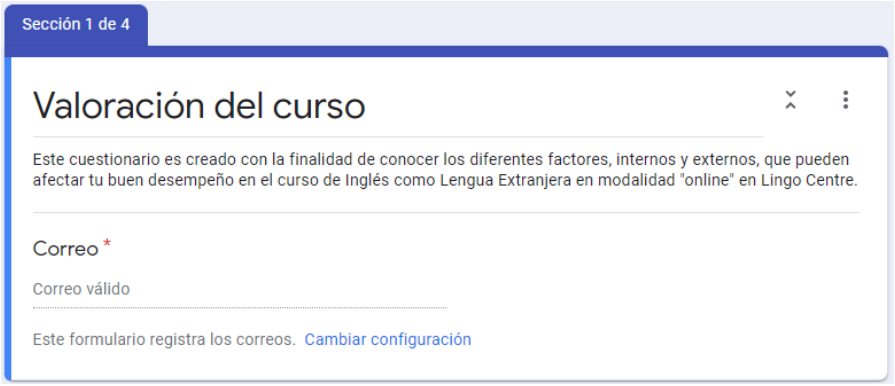
Appendix 1


Sección 1 de 4

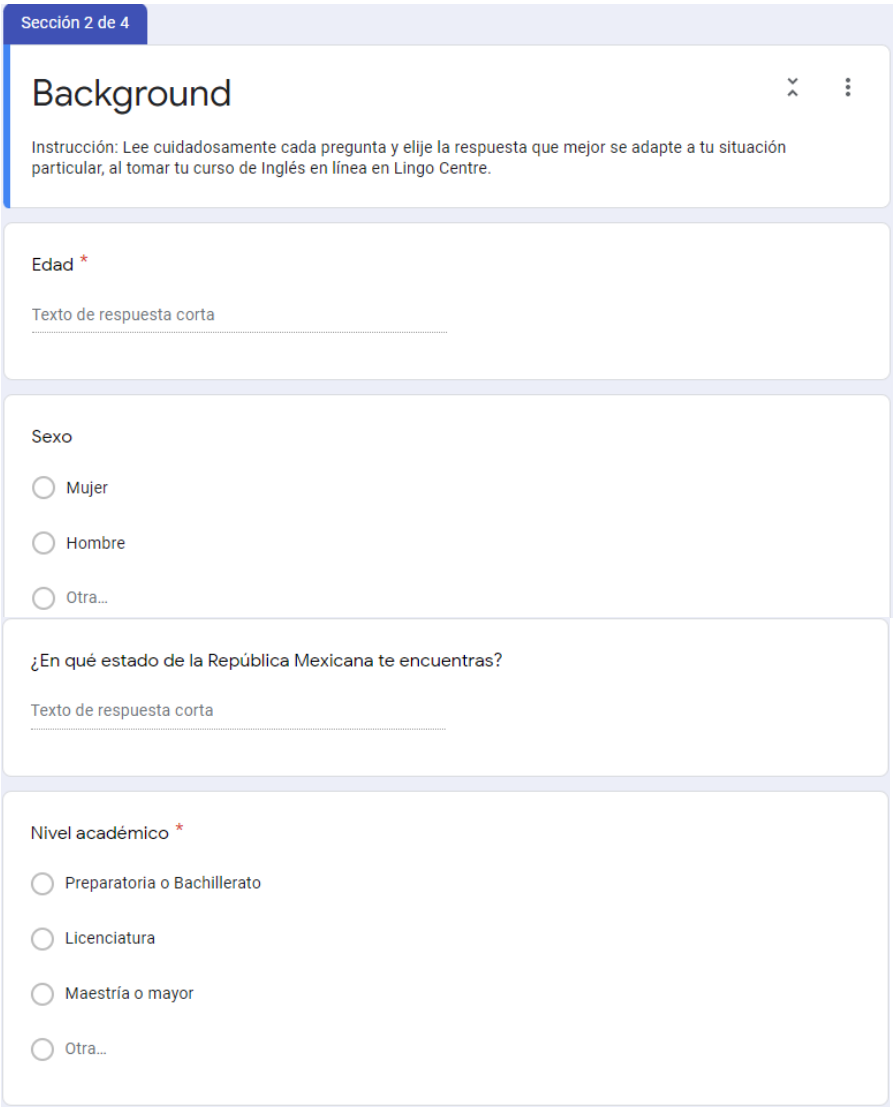
Valoración del curso

Este cuestionario es creado con la finalidad de conocer los diferentes factores, internos y externos, que pueden afectar tu buen desempeño en el curso de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en modalidad "online" en Lingo Centre.

Correo *

Correo válido

Este formulario registra los correos. Cambiar configuración


Sección 2 de 4

Background

Instrucción: Lee cuidadosamente cada pregunta y elije la respuesta que mejor se adapte a tu situación particular, al tomar tu curso de Inglés en línea en Lingo Centre.

Edad *

Texto de respuesta corta

Sexo

Mujer

Hombre

Otra...

¿En qué estado de la República Mexicana te encuentras?

Texto de respuesta corta

Nivel académico *

Preparatoria o Bachillerato

Licenciatura

Maestría o mayor

Otra...

Número de horas clase de Inglés en Lingo Centre por semana *

- ○ 3 horas
- ○ 4 horas
- ○ 5 horas
- ○ 6 horas

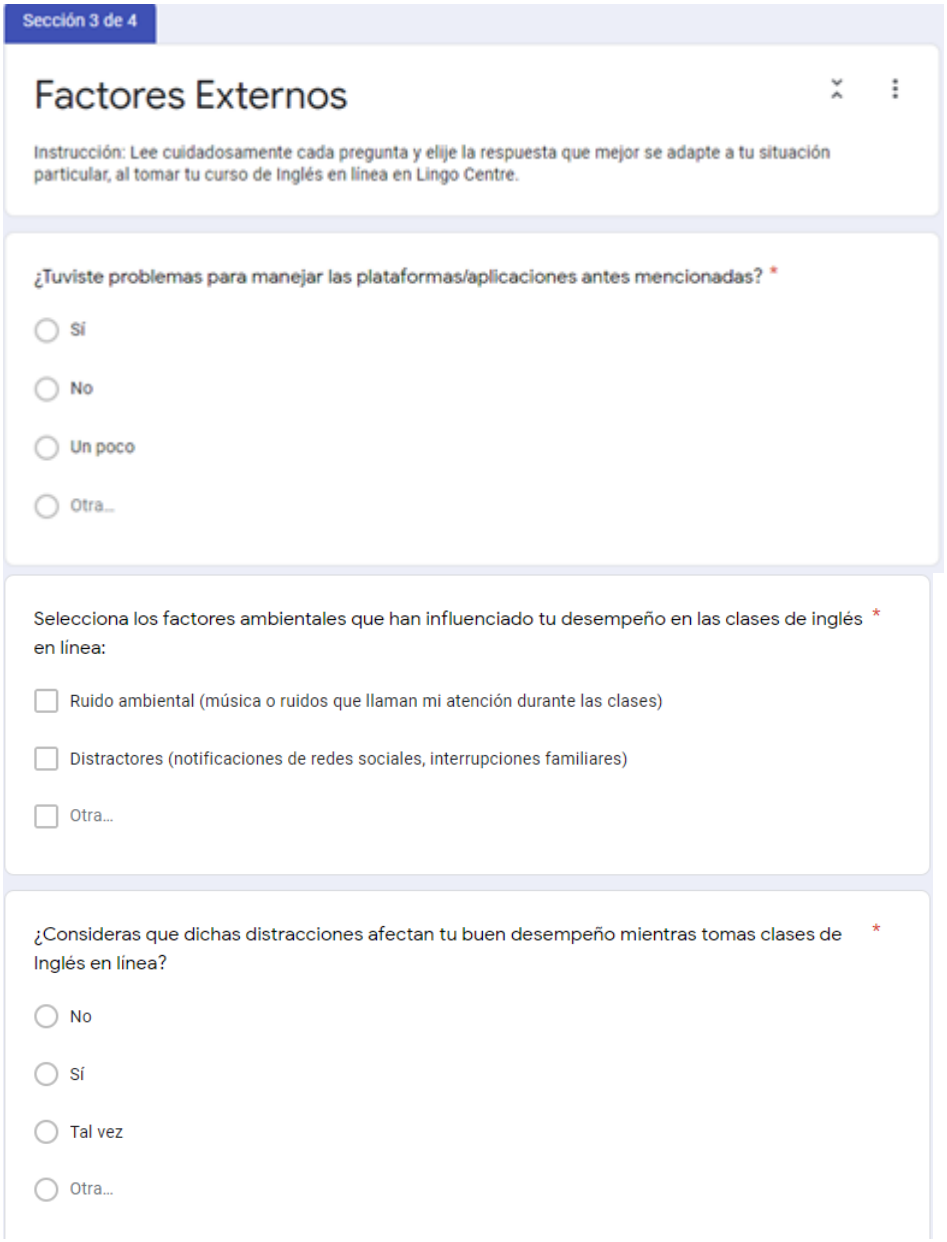
Marca el material que tienes disponible para tu curso de Inglés en línea en Lingo Centre: *

- ☐ Computadora (PC o Laptop)
- ☐ Teléfono celular (Smartphone)
- ☐ Impresora
- ☐ Libro de texto
- ☐ Cámara web
- ☐ Micrófono
- ☐ Libreta
- ☐ Lugar adecuado para tomar mis clases
- ☐ Otra...

Marca todas las plataformas/aplicaciones que usas en tus clases en línea en Lingo Centre: *

- ☐ Google Classroom
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Zoom
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Opción 5
- ☐ Opción 6
- ☐ Otra...

Appendix 2



Sección 3 de 4

Factores Externos

Instrucción: Lee cuidadosamente cada pregunta y elije la respuesta que mejor se adapte a tu situación particular, al tomar tu curso de Inglés en línea en Lingo Centre.

¿Tuviste problemas para manejar las plataformas/aplicaciones antes mencionadas? *

- Sí
- No
- Un poco
- Otra...

Selecciona los factores ambientales que han influenciado tu desempeño en las clases de inglés en línea: *

- [ ] Ruido ambiental (música o ruidos que llaman mi atención durante las clases)
- [ ] Distractores (notificaciones de redes sociales, interrupciones familiares)
- [ ] Otra...

¿Consideras que dichas distracciones afectan tu buen desempeño mientras tomas clases de Inglés en línea? *

- No
- Sí
- Tal vez
- Otra...

Consideras que la interacción Maestro-Alumno fue: *

- ◯ Poca
- ◯ Suficiente
- ◯ Buena
- ◯ Muy buena

¿Cuáles consideras como los puntos fuertes en el curso de Inglés en línea de Lingo Centre? *

- ☐ La atención semi-personalizada (explicaciones, sesiones "face to face" y ejercicios didácticos)
- ☐ La flexibilidad de horarios
- ☐ La motivación que el maestro me da
- ☐ El material de trabajo
- ☐ Otra...

¿Cuáles consideras como puntos débiles en el curso de Inglés en línea de Lingo Centre? *

- ☐ Las fallas en la conexión
- ☐ Falta de interacción con maestro y/o compañeros
- ☐ Distractores en mi área de estudio
- ☐ Fallas en el uso de dispositivos y/o medios electrónicos
- ☐ Otra...

Appendix 3

Sección 4 de 4

Factores Internos

Instrucción: Lea cuidadosamente cada pregunta y elija la respuesta que mejor se adapte a su situación particular.

Actualmente, ¿Te sientes motivado por el aprendizaje del idioma Inglés? *

- ○ Completamente
- ○ Parcialmente
- ○ No
- ○ Otra...

Explica brevemente, ¿Cuál fue tu principal motivación para tomar un curso de Inglés en línea? *

Texto de respuesta larga

¿Cuál es su concepto general sobre el idioma Inglés? *

- ○ Es difícil de aprender y no me gusta
- ○ Es fácil de aprender y me gusta
- ○ Otra...

¿Cuál fue el factor que lo llevó a abandonar sus estudios del idioma inglés anteriormente? *

Texto de respuesta larga

De acuerdo a tu experiencia, ¿Cuáles de los siguientes factores consideras que son fundamentales para el óptimo aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera? *

- [ ] Edad
- [ ] Aptitud
- [ ] Actitud
- [ ] Motivación interna (metas e intereses personales, académicos o laborales)
- [ ] Motivación externa (necesidad del idioma para fines académicos o laborales)
- [ ] Otra...

A lo largo de tu curso de Inglés en línea en Lingo Centre ¿Qué factores suelen desmotivarte de aprender el idioma Inglés? *

- [ ] No entender la clase
- [ ] La pronunciación
- [ ] Sentir que no avanzo en mi proceso
- [ ] No entender los ejercicios de "listening"
- [ ] Otra...

Muchas gracias por responder el cuestionario, nos será de gran ayuda en un futuro inmediato. *