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**LICENCIATURA EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

**PERCEPTIONS OF LEI TEACHERS ON THE IMPACT OF FEEDBACK  
AND ASSESSMENT ON STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY LEVEL IN  
TARGET LANGUAGE IV**

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## **Abstract**

According to the bachelor's degree in English Teaching (*Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés*) of *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, the LEI program aims to develop English teaching professionals with theoretical and practical knowledge, communicative competencies in English and Spanish, adaptability to diverse educational contexts, and intercultural communication promotion. Because of this, LEI students are required to achieve a specific level of proficiency, however, this do not always occur. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation is to identify what prevents LEI students to achieve this goal from LEI teachers' point of view. To identify this information, an opened ended questionnaire was applied to three LEI teachers, specifically Target Language IV teachers. This investigation explains that there are several impediments that prevents LEI students to achieve the desired proficiency level, not only related to the academic program as some might expect, but also to some personal issues from students and other external factors. In conclusion, this investigation demonstrates what needs to be done, so improvement takes place if these steps are followed.

**Keywords:** curriculum, assessment, feedback, proficiency, motivation, COVID-19.

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## **Dedications**

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

## 1.0 Introduction

The Faculty of Languages has two main academic programs: *Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Francés* (LEF) and *Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés* (LEI). According to the LEI graduate profile, the graduate will be a versatile and flexible teacher, interculturally competent, and will be proficient in English at an advanced level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In addition, it states that graduates will be able to use the English language at a B2 level of according to the CEFR by the end of Target Language IV. Level B2 refers to independent language users, or individuals who possess the required fluency to communicate with native speakers without difficulty. B2 users can efficiently convey ideas and make arguments face-to-face while expressing viewpoints. In addition, they can write clear, detailed English, expressing opinions and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of different points of view, write letters, reports, stories, and lots of other types of text. Another fact worth mentioning is that this level is required to work or complete internships abroad in most English-speaking nations (Global, 2020). LEI students are required to achieve this level to become proficient English teachers. However, this has become a more difficult task to accomplish after the COVID-19 pandemic. At this moment, it is not clear why this happens, which is why it is necessary to discover what prevents LEI students to achieve B2 level.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Some LEI students do not reach the level of proficiency that they are asked for, or their improvement might be low. In an English IV class students are supposed to achieve a B2

level, but this does not always happen. This might cause trouble for most LEI students since they need a B2 level to do their professional practice, to do and, in most situations, present their research project at the end of their degree, and, obviously, in the future be able to get a job in language teaching, but after the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, education and student learning have been affected.

## **1.2 Justification of the study**

From my experience in my Target Language classes, the type of evaluation was more of a one-time thing rather than ongoing. Therefore, this means that feedback did not take place most of the time and students did not know how to improve or what to improve for that matter. When I got feedback, sometimes, it was not very clear to me in a sense of what should have been done to improve. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the impact of feedback and assessment on the proficiency development and if it is truly useful for improvement. In short, LEI students' low improvement might be caused due to all the factors mentioned before. It is worth mentioning that the pandemic was not an issue when I took all my English courses, so for now, we can only infer that students' English proficiency development has gotten worse after this event.

## **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this paper was to identify the perceptions of LEI teachers on the role of feedback and assessment on the proficiency level of students at the end of Target Language IV and why, in their opinion, students did not reach the required level B2 at the end of this course and to present the teachers' perceptions on this phenomenon.

#### **1.4 General Objective**

The general objective of this document is to identify LEI teachers' perspectives on the impact of feedback and assessment on their students' proficiency level at the end of Target language IV.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The following three research questions were developed with the hope that they would yield the information required for this research to direct this investigation and accomplish the goal that had previously been suggested.

1. What is the impact of feedback on students' proficiency, according to LEI teachers?
2. What type of assessment do LEI teachers consider more appropriate to develop students' proficiency?
3. What is preventing students to achieve a B2 level, according to LEI teachers?

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This investigation may help the LEI community to understand the reasons why LEI students struggle to achieve a B2 proficiency level and to raise awareness of the importance of using feedback to enhance improvement, so LEI students can accomplish the required goals that are asked from their faculty in the fastest and most accurate way possible.

#### **1.7 Research Content and Organization**

Chapter 1 introduces the study and the phenomenon, which is that LEI students do not reach a B2 level by the end of English IV. Chapter 2 introduces the concepts of proficiency, assessment, evaluation, feedback, and other more related to them and the phenomenon, which

are discussed in detail. Chapter 3 presents a description of the research process and the stages of the research process. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings in detail while chapter 5 integrates the findings with the theoretical framework and literature review. Chapter 5 also concludes the study by presenting a summary of the overall research, stating the limitations of the research, and providing recommendations and possible solutions for future research.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature review necessary to provide the reader with rich information and insights about concepts such as assessment, curriculum, feedback, proficiency, and other concepts related to them. This chapter also presents the related literature and studies which have been done by researchers to have a better understanding of the study.

### **2.1 Curriculum**

Curriculum design is the planning, organization, and designing of materials, or deciding which ones to use with the objective of defining outcomes and developing students' skills. These outcomes may vary depending on the different educational criteria, but "the ultimate goal is to improve student learning" (Schweitzer, 2019), and the best way to achieve this is by using different tools, such as standard tests, classwork activities, games, and more, that allow teachers to see how well students perform on tasks. A successful encouragement may be inefficient or ineffective whether any of these factors mentioned before are not considered (Macalister, 2009). All these factors previously mentioned will vary depending on the type of curriculum design the institution or course will use. According to Schweitzer (2019), there are three basic types of curriculum design: subject-centered, learner-centered, and problem-centered.

- Subject-centered design: as the name itself suggests, focuses on a specific discipline.

In other words, the focus is the details of a subject. This means that usually there is

a list of standardized knowledge that students are expected to acquire at the end of the course (Schweitzer, 2019). However, this does not guarantee that learners will use this information later in their academic or adult life due to the curriculum's emphasis on memorization. This is something that many students have faced during their academic lives, especially, in public primary and middle schools. This might happen due to the overuse of textbooks, in fact, another name for this curriculum is the textbook-centered design. This name is because it focuses on memorization and repetition of facts, ideas, or concepts; in language learning would be grammar rules, and vocabulary (Tucker, 2011). This phenomenon is something that still happens today in many schools and even universities, where there are large groups of students, which makes it impossible to teachers to focus on their students' needs and ways of learning.

- **Learner-centered design:** this design focuses more on students' needs, interests, and skills, which means that not all students learn in the same way (Schweitzer, 2019). In contrast to subject-centered design, where teachers have total control over how students will acquire knowledge and how much time will be spent on each topic, the learner-centered design gives students some control over what they're learning and how. Then comes to assess students' performance and find out learners' strengths, and weaknesses, and then, give them feedback on how to improve them. An excellent example of this curriculum design is an online course. Online courses provide a lot of different options, one of them is a customized study plan, where most of the time there is only one student and they can choose their schedule, how they will learn, set their goals, and track their progress. As we can see, a disadvantage of this design is

that it put a lot of pressure on the teacher to create or find materials according to the students' needs. There might be some teachers that find this task difficult due to their lack of time or experience (Schweitzer, 2019). At Facultad de Lenguas BUAP, it could be seen most of the time that the courses were subject centered because there were around 15 to 20 students per course, there might be more. It was in fact, very rare to see courses with less than 10 students, so it is understandable why most teachers always did the book activities.

- Problem-centered design: This type of curriculum considers real-world problems and makes students come up with ideas to solve them (Silver, 2004). Problem-centered curricula also take a learner-centered approach since it gives students the power to choose how the problem will be solved by deciding the knowledge and skills to apply (Savery, 2006).

These curriculum designs provide the base of what abilities, knowledge, and skills the students will learn and develop. It also tells us how students will achieve these desired goals. Knowing these curriculum designs might help to understand better how their proficiency level develops, and to find out this, teachers need some sort of evidence that proves students are reaching the established goals and objectives.

## **2.2 Summative Assessment**

According to Surbhi, (2017), states that summative assessment is judgmental and product-oriented because it focuses on the quality of a product or performance, in other words, it gauges people's outcomes to determine their worth, significance, value, and in language teaching, their level, and then provides an overall grade. He also claims that evaluation is

governed by a set of standards that helps evaluators, teachers, instructors, to determine whether the goals or objectives of a specific curriculum are being achieved and if they are, to what extent. Feedback on summative assessment relies on the level of quality as per set standard, to put it another way, in summative assessments, feedback is given to ascertain whether the standards are met or not.

According to Bastable (2008), summative assessment is used to gather, interpret, and summarize data to determine two main points:

- Students' degree (mastery of content), which means what students have learned and can do with the language in all aspects of it. For example, oral and written production, reading and listening comprehension, and a firm understanding of all cultural elements.
- The effectiveness of teaching strategies and educational activities.

Summative assessment is a formal process because it occurs at specific moments during the course, which most of the time, are in the middle and at the end of it (Bastable, 2008). In addition, all evaluation criteria must be set beforehand by all instructors and evaluators, and students must be informed when the evaluation takes place and what criteria will be evaluated. However, this type of assessment can be deceiving since its only purpose is to see if the standards are met rather than see if the student is actually learning. In this type of evaluation, many students only memorize information because of their final exams or an important performance, which causes that most students forget most of the information learned.



### 2.3 Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is also a systematic process where teachers use empirical data to measure knowledge, skills, or the success of a program, course, or curriculum to improve performance (Stassen, et al., 2001). Formative assessment, unlike summative assessment, is diagnostic and process-oriented because it focuses on collecting, reviewing, and using data to identify areas of improvement and improve the quality of the current performance (Surbhi, 2017). In other words, it aims to identify weaknesses so students can close the gap between their current situation and their future learning and achievement. Moreover, the formative assessment allows teachers to determine learners' strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills. Surbhi also stated that assessment is an ongoing interactive process where the main relationship between the teacher and the student is reflective rather than prescriptive. Since the purpose of the assessment is to increase the quality of students' performance, the feedback when assessing is based on what the learner can do now. In short, it is based on observation and the positive and negative outcomes that will help teachers and students to know the current state of learners' mastery of language skills, the desired goal, and the next steps of improvement (Surbhi, 2017).

Additionally, Zou (2008) states that assessment has several purposes such as, motivating students, improving learning, providing feedback to students and teachers about student understanding, and checking whether learning outcomes are being achieved. However, this type of assessment is difficult to apply in most situations since is focused on each student's needs, which in groups of more than 10 people this can be impossible for teachers to handle. This is why at the *Facultad de Lenguas* most English courses use summative assessment rather than formative because it is the fastest way to evaluate all the students.

## **2.4 Feedback**

Jun (2015) claims that feedback is information that tells students how well they did on performance, and it gives them specific insight into how they can do better. Feedback is an instructive language that positively influences behavior. Feedback also identifies flaws in learners' outcomes and provides guidance to fix them or avoid them. Additionally, Nicol (2010), states that the main objectives of feedback are to:

- Identify specific weaknesses and reward students' strengths.
- Guide students on how to improve their weakest areas or skills.
- Encourage them to act on their assessment.
- Develop their capacity to monitor, evaluate and regulate their learning.

### **2.4.1 Effective feedback**

Feedback is integral to students' growth as it rises self-awareness, increases motivation, and improves performance (Minnoni, et al., 2017). These factors are just some of what effective feedback is. Effective feedback focuses on the person's performance or product rather than his or her personality, in other words, feedback is impartial. It is also contextualized, which means that it must be specific so the person can receive it and use it appropriately and more easily. Lastly, effective feedback is balanced. Both, positive and negative aspects of the person's performance must be highlighted and transforms the negative into the potential to encourage change and growth in the person.

### **2.4.2 Ineffective feedback**

On the contrary, feedback can also be ineffective and useless. According to Minnoni et al. (2017), feedback can be ineffective when it is based on a person's characteristics rather than his or her performance. In addition, feedback is not useful if it is given for other purposes, for example, for obligation, favoritism, and it is not given to aid students. Furthermore, it is not effective when is too general and when there is an imbalance between highlighting the positive or negative too much. In the former case, highlighting strengths too much may cause a lack of credibility; in the latter case, highlighting weaknesses too much may create demotivation, closure, and aggression. Lastly, feedback is not effective when it is judgmental and it only points out negative, without revealing potential. As we can see, feedback has an important role due to its guidance in proficiency development since it makes easier for students to identify their weak and strong areas and how to transform those weak areas into strong ones, without it many students would feel lost and in a loop of endless learning which could cause stress on the student. Minnoni et al. (2017) believe that the effectiveness of feedback also depends on the students' willingness to accept it. They claim that feedback is an exchange: it implies the willingness to help clarify students' misunderstandings and the willingness to receive and accept moments of consequent learning and awareness, keeping the idea of personal criticism and judgment far away. This last part it is important because there can also be times when learners feel judged and they do not take the criticism well, but this depends also on the student.

### **2.5 Proficiency**

In terms of language, the term proficiency is used to describe a person's capability in a foreign language both in the classroom and in real-world situations. According to the

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), “proficiency is the ability to use the language in real-world situations in a spontaneous interaction and non-rehearse context and a manner acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language” (ACTFL, 2012b, p. 4). Proficiency demonstrates what an individual can do with the language in terms of speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Proficiency refers to the language degree a person has and how well he or she can use the language and understand it. According to the Council of Europe in the form of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (2001), competency refers to all the knowledge and skills an individual develops to communicate with others. These competences are divided into two categories:

- **General competences.** It is comprised mainly of knowledge, skills, and of the ability to learn.
- **Communicative competences.** It is concerned with the use of language and is examined from the perspective of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences. Linguistic knowledge is seen in terms of grammatical elements of a language. Sociolinguistic competence refers to social conventions and expected behavior towards different people, for example, men and women, old and young people, people from different cultures, in interaction. Finally, pragmatic competence is the knowledge of matching linguistic output with a given situation according to interaction norms.

Based on the discussion on the definitions of language proficiency above, it is obvious that modern understanding of proficiency is not concerned merely with linguistic correctness, but also concerns the contexts of language and its appropriate functions which play a significant

role in determining whether a user of a language is communicating proficiently or not. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), proficiency seeks to see how well an individual has mastered a language. In addition, proficiency is measured in terms of receptive and productive language skills, such as syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and pragmatics in the four domains of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In brief, second language learners must demonstrate their abilities to understand and produce language in the four domains. Based on all the information showed previously, we can see that learning a language goes beyond learning only the vocabulary and grammatic structures but also how to put the language in context of discourse, in other words, in real life situations.

### **2.5.1 Proficiency level in Target Language classes**

The LEI program contains a wide variety of subjects, among the most important are the Target Language. These subjects consist of learning English as a foreign language, so they are categorized in five different levels with different criteria, which is governed by the CEFR criteria, that students need to pass to achieve a B2 English level. However, for the purpose of this study, we will only focus on Target language III, IV and V.

### **2.5.2 Target Language III**

After taking English II, which is just starting B1 level, students advance to Target Language III that works on B1+. Despite of being “plus”, during this target language LEI students are still refining their language skills to reach B2. According to the Council of Europe (2001), a B1 user must be able to perform the following tasks:

“Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans”. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

In short, in this target language, students should be able to perform all the abilities and skills mentioned before without much inconvenience, since they already had B1 in target language II.

### **2.5.3 Target language IV**

Moving on to target language IV, this is the level where students start now as B2 users. The Council of Europe states the B2 users can do the following:

“Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options”. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

As seen, there is a big difference between these two levels. B2 level, also known as the Upper-Intermediate level is where students will start using more complicated grammar rules and vocabulary, with the purpose of not only communicating with family or friends of topics of interest for them, but also, to communicate with strangers or with high rank authorities. Also,

using the language for academic purposes and the working life, especially if they want to travel or work in English speaking countries.

#### **2.5.4 Target Language V**

Finally, in target language V, students start working on the C1 level, according to the LEI's program. Based on this, it is clear to assume that students during this last target language already master the B2. Once again, according to the Council of Europe (2001), C1 users can:

“Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices”. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4)

The C1 level is known as the “Advanced level”, so in other words, in this target language students will start to communicate concepts clearly and naturally without having to search for the right expressions in social, academic, professional, or business contexts both in written and spoken language.

#### **2.6 COVID-19 pandemic**

The 2020-2021 academic year was unlike any other. Since March 2020, Mexico's National Education System, at all levels, has faced one of the greatest educational challenges in its history, because of the covid-19 pandemic. Faced with the temporary closure of both public and private schools, distance learning classes were implemented. As a result, teachers, and students alike, have faced several challenges. The former had to adapt instructional

approaches to remote teaching or even create new material to the new learning requirements, besides familiarize themselves with new technologies while the latter found themselves lost as to what to do with their learning. Some even had to find ways to keep with their studies since they had difficulties learning remotely due to the lack of electronic devices or poor internet connection, these being the main difficulties. But in general, the pandemic had a different impact on students' learning. Some educators emphasized that the lack of physical interaction affects language teaching because it prevents authentic communication with the student. During the pandemic synchronous and asynchronous communication became essential on remote learning, however, teachers reported that these were not engaging students with their learning due to the institutional approaches were not designed for an online interaction or because external distractors at learners' homes (Mavridi, 2023).

Additionally, the lack of observable and sound feedback has made more difficult to teachers to know if their students understood the topics. Some teachers agreed that it was difficult to assess students, especially in terms of reading and writing, because of the lack of reliability. Studies have found that a few teachers reported that students secretly looked up or copied information from the internet which led teachers to believe that their students were learning when in fact, they were not (Mavridi, 2023). The absence of visual clues, such as, turned on cameras was just another concern during these times of confinement because it prevented teachers to observe, monitor, and evaluate their students' performance.

## **2.7 Perceptions**

Perception is the sensory experience of the world. It involves both recognizing environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. "Through the perceptual process, we gain information about the properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our



survival. Perception not only creates our experience of the world around us; it allows us to act within our environment” (Cherry, verywellmind, 2020).

Perception can be defined as our recognition and interpretation of sensory information as just as how we respond to the information. We can think of perception as a process where we take in sensory information from our environment and use that information to interact with it. Perception allows us to take the sensory information and make it into something meaningful.

It all starts with “sensation”, which is the bottom-up process by which our senses (touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste) detect, receive, and relay outside stimuli. On the other hand, perception is the top-down way our brains organize, interpret, and react to that information and put it in context. All this process is known as the “perceptual process.”

The perceptual process begins when our sensory receptors (eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin) meet sensory stimuli (sights, sounds, tastes, odors, and textures). Some of these outside stimuli are paid attention to, and some are tuned out completely. Those that receive our attention are evaluated and interpreted and after a time, some of these stimuli become adapted and we cease to remark on their significance.

## **2.8 Affective factors**

Affective factors are emotional factors that influence learning. They can have a negative or positive effect. These factors include emotion, feeling, mood, manner, attitude, and so on. All these factors, especially, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, decide the input and output of the second language. These affective factors can promote or impede language input

depending on the learner's emotions. If the second language learner has strong self-esteem, is motivated, and has moderate anxiety, they will have much more language input, which means the "affective filter" plays a weaker role, and on the contrary, if the learner has little self-esteem, lacks motivation, and has anxiety, the affective filter will play a bigger role in preventing the learner from learning successfully.

Affective factors in foreign language teaching and learning refers to two related aspects. The first is the individual factors of learners, such as motivation, anxiety, and self-esteem, and the second one is the relationship-building aspects of education, such as the learning environment, interaction between students, and teachers (Wang, 2013). In humanistic psychology, it is said that learners have both intellectual and emotional needs and that cannot be treated separately. Therefore, the following affective factors should be considered by teachers.

### **2.8.1 Motivation**

In psychology, motivation means the internal process that which people are stimulated to take certain actions to meet certain needs. In language learning, motivation is the learners' desire and impulse to learn the language, providing power and impetus to the learners. There is a wide range of definitions seen from different perspectives, for example, from a behavioral perspective, it implies that the person will be rewarded at the end. Motivation is also defined as "the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit." (Brown, 2001, p. 34). Of all the significant affective variables, motivation is arguably the most important one for language acquisition success since it can capture student's attentions and increase their interests to find and use more learning strategies.

Motivation is divided into two types: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (Arnold & Douglas, 2000). **Extrinsic motivation** comes from the desire of getting rewards and avoiding punishment. In other words, someone will act in certain ways not because they like it or find it enjoyable, but rather because they want to obtain something in return or stay away from something unpleasant. These come from the outside world. **Intrinsic motivation**, on the other hand, refers to people's internal needs, like feelings of achievement, competence, and self-determination. In short, it means there is no reward than achieving the activity itself. These two types of motivation can influence learning. There are people who consider extrinsic is the most important while others say is intrinsic, however, both can show a different effect on human behavior. According to Cherry (2022), extrinsic motivation used moderately can have a positive influence in intrinsic motivation, for example, intrinsic motivation will decrease when external rewards are given for doing a certain activity or merely putting in minimal effort, the same when rewards and praises are constantly given or said to the person. However, getting a positive praise or feedback occasionally can improve intrinsic motivation. In conclusion, both types of motivation are both important for learning.

### **2.8.2 Self-esteem**

According to Rubio, self-esteem refers to “a psychological and social phenomenon in which an individual evaluates his/her competence and own self according to [a set of] values” (Rubio, 2007, p. 5). In other words, expresses how much a person believes and trusts in themselves. Self-esteem is another vital factor due to its influence on learners' performances. For learners, especially second language learners, self-esteem plays a bigger role because they are deprived of the discourse competence of their mother tongue, and this may cause them to feel vulnerable in a context where only an unfamiliar language is being spoken. It

has been seen that students who have high self-esteem exhibit greater confidence and offer more favorable self-evaluations, both of which will help them learn the language. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem struggle with oral English learning or feel less comfortable and confident speaking English in class (Wang, 2013). In general, learners feel anxious when they are in a specific communicative situation or under a specific task. As a result, some students who lack confidence are usually found to be extremely fearful and timid, and reluctant to express their opinions in class. According to Wang (2013), teachers can aid in the development of their students' self-esteem by convincing them of their own worth, significance, ability, and achievement. That is the first step in establishing a supportive and trusting workplace based on communication and scaffolding.

### **2.8.3 Anxiety**

Anxiety is another, and probably the biggest obstacle in language learning because it is one of the prominent emotions. Anxiety is a psychological response that occurs when a person faces stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations which can cause negative feelings such as tension, sadness, discomfort, and unease (Jovanovic, 2023). In language learning, it refers to the learners' fearfulness when expressing in another language than their own. Students with anxiety attending classes will feel nervous to cooperate with teachers. There are three types of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. The last-mentioned is the one that received considerable attention in SLA. This is because it refers to a specific type of situation or event, for example, speaking in public, exams, or class participation. Second language learners' anxiety is due to their competitive natures. There is a tendency of comparing themselves with other more proficient students, which can directly lower students'

willingness to participate, leading to decreased motivation, unfavorable attitudes, and issues with language proficiency (Wang, 2013).

However, the anxiety might decrease when they perceive themselves as becoming more proficient, and therefore better able to compete. Teachers can help to decrease students' anxiety by providing some degree of encouragement, for instance, a smile or a few encouraging or praising words would help them to overcome their negative anxiousness and poor self-esteem more effectively (Wang, 2013).

## **2.9 Conclusion**

As previously stated, throughout the entire chapter, various authors and their theories were mentioned. These theories were explained to give accurate details on language proficiency as well as other aspects that are closely associated to proficiency development, such as, curriculum design, assessment, and feedback. Furthermore, another purpose of this second chapter was to help readers see that there are more factors that can make proficiency development high, low, or even non-existent that need to be considered, especially, by future language teachers.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a description of the research design of the study. Besides, the setting where the study was conducted, the population who were the focus of the research, research instruments, and the data collection procedures are also described in detail. Finally, this chapter discusses the research paradigm, research method, and ethical considerations that were kept during the making of the study.

### **3.1 Research design**

According to Williamson and Johanson (2018), the choice of paradigm, methods, and instruments or procedures to investigate research issues and to produce new information constitutes the methodology, which is the overall framework or design of the study. The most suitable approach for this study was a case study. A case study is a method in which a single person, a group or a community face a particular problem, the case. This type of design facilitates the exploration of real problem within a defined context, using a variety of sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2003) a case study is useful when the researcher aims the following objectives: a) seeks to answer the questions “how” and “why b) does not want to get manipulate the participants’ behavior or opinions c) the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions due to its relevance to the phenomenon under study.

### **3.2 Justification**

LEI students have struggled with achieving the expected outcome of LEI’s program, which is achieving B2 by the end of Target Language IV. The younger generations are facing the same problem nowadays. There could be different reasons that might cause this problem that

are not very clear to this day. A case study was followed since it sought to provide rich data to increase the understanding of why this phenomenon takes place from the teachers' perspectives.

### **3.3 Context of study**

The study was conducted at *the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (BUAP). The BUAP is an autonomous public university located in Mexico, Puebla. As it is established in the official website of BUAP, the university offers 82 academic programs and has 25 different faculties. This study was conducted at Facultad de Lenguas, which has two main academic programs, *Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés (LEI)*, and *Licenciatura en enseñanza del Francés (LEF)*. La Facultad de Lenguas BUAP offers students the degrees of teaching French and English as foreign languages. Its purpose is to develop interested candidates into professionals in pedagogy, in other words, to create experts in the process of teaching foreign languages.

### **3.4 Participants**

The participants of this project consisted of 3 LEI teachers, especially teachers who were teaching or have taught English IV and V. Teachers who were teaching lower levels were excluded. The participants' ages and genders differentiate between one and other as shown in Table 1:

**Table. 1. The participants**

Participants	Gender	Years of experience	Target language
<b>Leopold</b>	Male	20	V
<b>Octavius</b>	Male	23	IV
<b>Daphne</b>	Female	+20	IV

Table 1 above shows some general information about the participants that was considered necessary to know more about their background, more specifically, their area of expertise, which is language teaching.

### **3.5 Instrument**

The instrument planned for this project was a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a research instrument that consists in a series of different questions. The questionnaire is a useful instrument due to the facility of obtaining large amounts of information. It is efficient and a quick instrument to work with. In addition, these characteristics make the questionnaire an instrument that allows the researcher to gather opinions, preferences, and intentions. According to Burns (2010), it is suitable to use a questionnaire when the researcher seeks to get responses from their participants but the researcher or the participants do not have enough time to interview. A questionnaire was the best option for this project since LEI teachers were facing the hybrid modality and they did not have enough time to be interviewed. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions, seven of them were open-ended items and only one a multiple-choice question. The reason of why most of the questions were open-ended



was that I wanted to give the participant the opportunity to explain their answers so I could get different perspectives from each one.

### **3.6 Data collection**

The first thing I did was to find who were the teachers in charge of the Target Language IV and V of the Spring 2023 period. This information was available in *La Facultad de Lenguas'* official website. After that, I managed to get the professors' emails, so I could contact them. Next, I sent them an email explaining the situation and all the details, such as, the purpose of their help, what was the study about, how could they help me, and so on. The questionnaire was a Google form, so it could be easier and faster for teachers to answer it. However, I still faced some difficulties due to most teachers did not answer the email while the ones who accepted to help took quite some time to answer it.

### **3.7 Validity criteria**

The type of criteria that will give validity to this thesis is the credibility criteria. Credibility criteria establish that the results of qualitative research are believable from the perspective of the participant of the research project. The participant is the only one who can judge the credibility of the results. This criterion is acceptable for qualitative research since its purpose is to describe or understand a phenomenon from the participant's perspectives, observations, and experiences (Swanwick, 2018).

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

The ethical considerations for this project are the informed consent of the participants as well as their voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity (Bhandari, 2021). This research project will only reveal relevant information of the participant such as years of

expertise and gender in order to protect their privacy. The results of this investigation will only be for academic purposes (Bhandari, 2021) which was communicated to the participants who agreed to become part of the study.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

The research instrument used was a questionnaire. After the questionnaires were answered; first, I read the data several times and started looking for patterns that can answer my research questions and achieve my objectives. After that, I looked for similarities and differences in among the participants' answers and put those findings in different figures, charts, and tables. The full-described analysis, which granted the researcher more familiarity with the data from each questionnaire, is provided in Chapter 4. Based on the literature review, most of them utilize the following set of topics as a framework for discussion and comparison: proficiency, assessment, feedback.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter showed the methodology for this qualitative research project, whose purpose was to increase the understanding of why LEI students struggled to reach the required level B2 from the teachers' perspectives. In addition, the instrument and the data collection and its procedure were stated. The following chapter will present the findings of the study in detail.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides the results of the qualitative analysis from the data collected. The objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers on the impact of feedback and assessment on students' proficiency level at the end of Target Language IV and V. The chapter also includes a discussion section to make an objective interpretation of the results.

### **4.1 Summary of the study**

As it has been stated during the whole research, the LEI program states that students will have attained a B2 proficiency level by the end of Target Language IV. However, some LEI students may not achieve the required level of proficiency, or their improvement may be minimal. Therefore, as a reminder, the main purpose of this research was to identify LEI teachers' perceptions on the impact of feedback and assessment on students' proficiency levels and why in their opinion students did not achieve the required level B2 at the end of this course. It is worth noting that since LEI students require this level to complete their professional practice and, therefore, to be able to find employment in language teaching in the future, this could be problematic for them. Finally, I expect that this investigation provides more information and understanding about the struggles faced in achieving a B2 proficiency level.

### **4.2 Results**

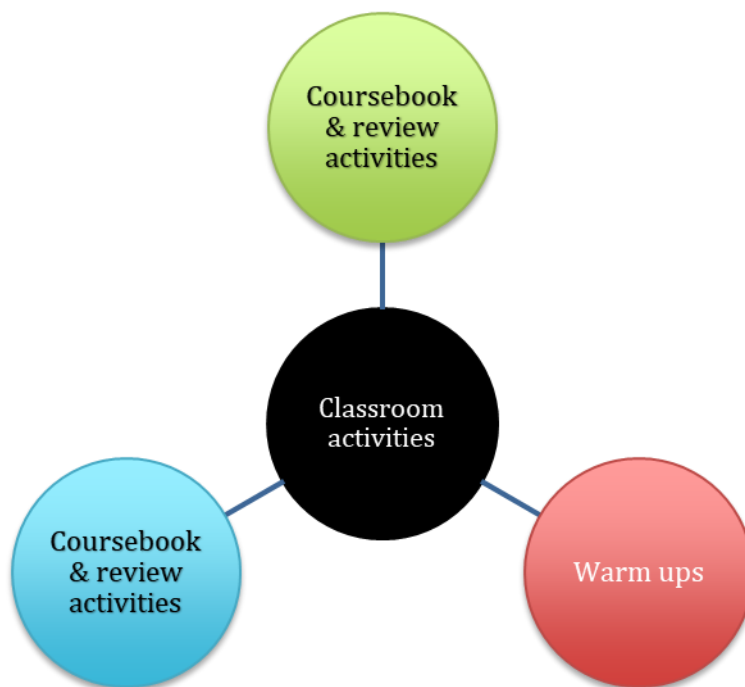
A questionnaire was used to get different perspectives from LEI teachers since they did not have enough time to be interviewed due to the mixed modality they faced. The following charts and figures show the overall perspectives that teachers have related to their students'

proficiency development. The main purpose of these is to identify LEI teachers' perceptions on the impact of feedback and assessment on students' proficiency level at the end of Target Language IV and perhaps also to understand why students struggle to achieve B2 level.

#### 4.2.1 Target language sessions

Participants were asked to describe briefly what activities they normally did during their English sessions to get a little general information about the type of curriculum used in Target Language courses. However, their answers were a bit vague.

**Fig. 1. Teachers' activities in the classroom**



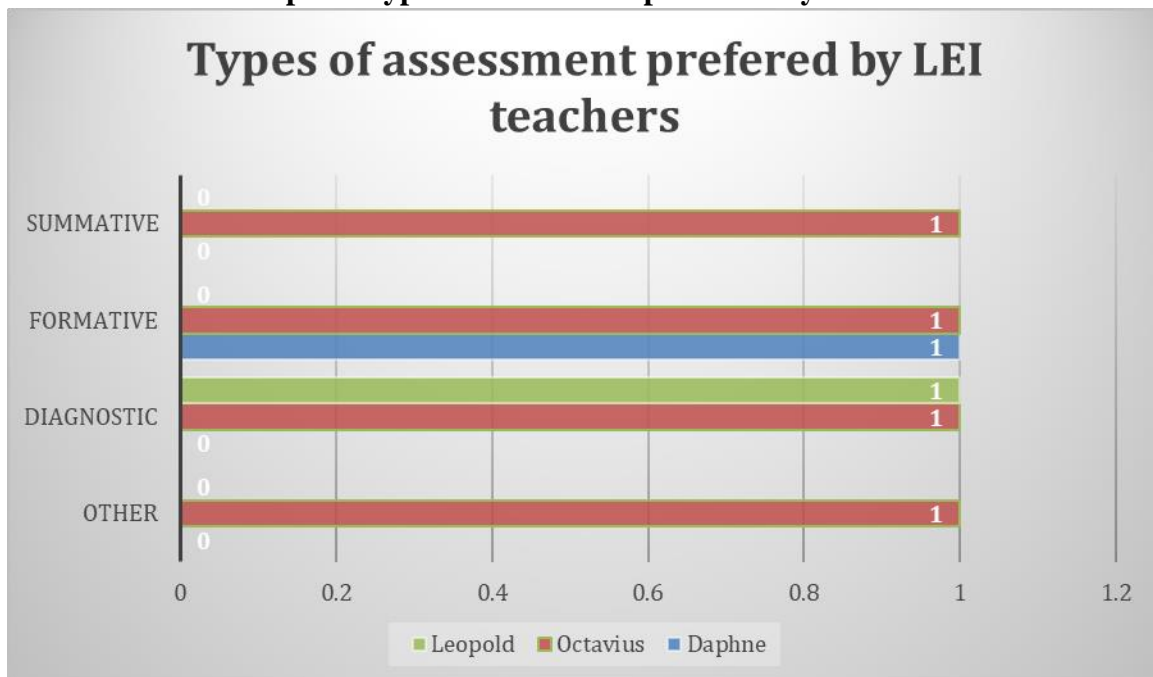
One of the first aspects described by the participants was the activities they did in the classroom. In the figure above participants mentioned the main activities they did during their sessions. Leopold, which is green, mentioned that he followed mainly the coursebook and complemented with extra activities to help their students strengthen their weak areas. Even

though Leopold followed the subject-centered more, which focuses on standardized knowledge that must be acquired at the end of a course by learners (Schweitzer, 2019), he still tried to focus on his students' needs as well. Daphne, which is in blue, had a similar answer since she also mentioned that she used the coursebook and made review exercises, however, she specified that her review activities focused only on vocabulary. Octavius, which is in red, on the other hand, only mentioned he made use of pre activities. With the information mentioned before it can be assumed that probably most of the LEI teachers' focus is to see if their students meet the requirements stated in the program.

#### 4.2.2 Evaluation for English improvement

Participants were asked to indicate their preferred type(s) of assessment that were helpful to develop students' improvement. However, when explaining why, they did not give many details, so we could only infer.

**Graph 1. Types of assessment preferred by teachers**



In the chart above, there is a contrast among participants' answers. While Leopold and Daphne only used one type of assessment, Octavius on the other hand, used a variety of them. (Ramsden, 2003) states that using a range of assessment methods gives students more freedom to demonstrate their knowledge and skills across a range of contexts.

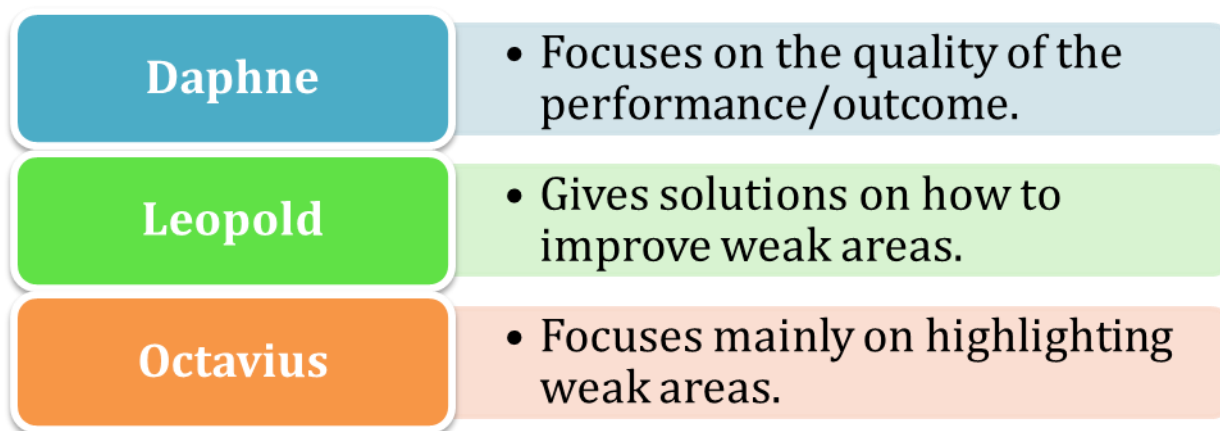
#### **4.2.2.1 Types of assessment for improving proficiency level**

Despite of Octavius not describing exactly why he used all these different assessment types, it can be assumed that he supported the statement mentioned before according to his answer, since he was the only one who selected all types and added one more, which was peer assessment. (Promethean, 2017) claims that each assessment type provides different insights and actions for educators. Leopold mentioned he was not very familiar with these types of assessment, however, he mentioned he evaluated his students' competence in the four domains of language, which are listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Based on this and in his previous answers on Figure 1 and Graph 1, could be that Leopold considered continuous assessment vital in students' improvement. Daphne shared the same thought since she also considered formative assessment helpful for improvement. Formative assessment is diagnostic and focuses on the process since it helps to identify weak areas and increase their quality by reviewing them constantly (Surbhi, 2017). Regarding the different methods teachers used to evaluate their students' degree, all three seemed to care about their students' language proficiency development to some extent.

### 4.2.3 The role of feedback in improving language skills

Participants were asked to describe their comments towards their students' performance or outcomes with the purpose of knowing the role of feedback and its impact on students' proficiency degree. Only one of the participants described vaguely their comments.

Fig. 2. Teachers' feedback /comments



Octavius and Daphne did not specify why their comments were focused on performance and mistakes; however, Leopold mentioned the reason behind his comments, which was to guide his students to become better in their language skills. June (2015) argues that feedback is knowledge that reveals to learners their performance level and provides them with precise advice on how to improve, which is an aspect of the usefulness of giving feedback.

#### 4.2.3.1 Effective and ineffective feedback

Despite of the vagueness of the participants' answers they still show that all three of them focused on different things when giving feedback. Leopold and Octavius stated that they helped students to identify weaknesses; Leopold even offering solutions to improve them. (Nicol, 2010) states that the main objectives of feedback are to:

- Recognize students' strengths.
- Help pupils identify and strengthen their areas of weakness.
- Encourage them to act on their assessment.
- Develop their capacity to monitor, evaluate and regulate their learning.

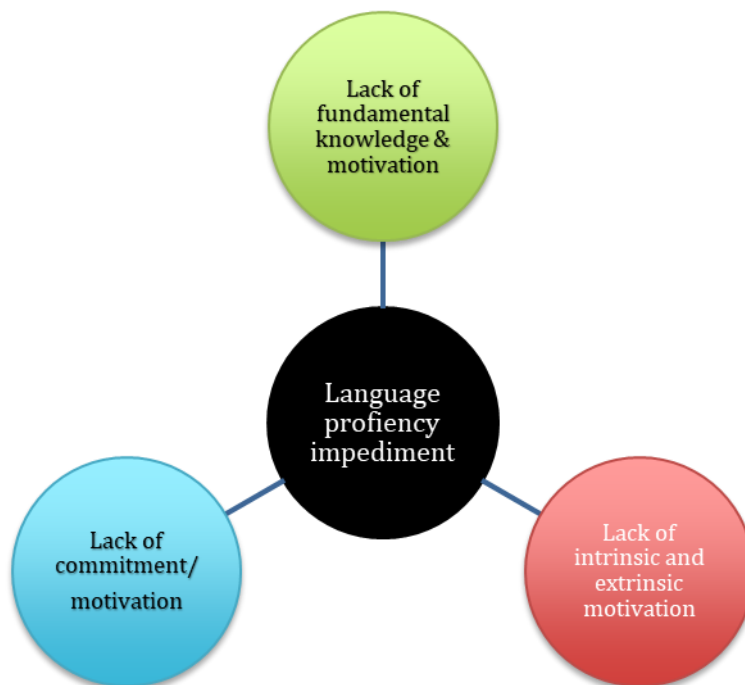
Daphne's answer was the vaguest out of the three on this matter, however, she mentioned something important about being tactful when giving feedback. Effective feedback aims to criticize students' outcomes to help them to improve not to undermine them. Furthermore, highlighting weaknesses too much may create demotivation, closure, and aggression. So, feedback must be balanced, which means that both, positive and negative aspects of the person's performance must be highlighted and transforms negative into potential to encourage change and growth in the person (Minnoni, et al., 2017). The rest of the participants did not specify any of this so it cannot be certain if they take into consideration their students' feelings.

#### **4.2.4 The impediments in developing language proficiency**

Participants shared their opinions on what was preventing their students from achieving the required level of proficiency. All three participants shared the same opinion on one thing, which was that LEI students lack motivation.



**Fig.3. LEI teachers' opinions on LEI students not achieving B2 level**



All three participants stated that students lacked motivation among other things, which are described in the following point. The participants considered that the lack of motivation was the main impediment of achieving B2 level. According to Brown (2001), motivation is the degree to which you choose what objectives to pursue and how much work and time you will put into those objectives. Octavius even argued that LEI students lack both, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in their bachelor's degree. As it was previously showed in chapter II, extrinsic motivation arises from outside of the individual while intrinsic motivation comes from within. Now, from my own experience during my college stage it was usually teachers and students blaming each other. Complaints could be heard from both sides. Teachers tended to complain about students starting the degree with any intrinsic motivation in the first place and that students were expecting professors to give them one. If students do not have a reason to go to college and finish the degree to begin with, they cannot expect teachers to motivate

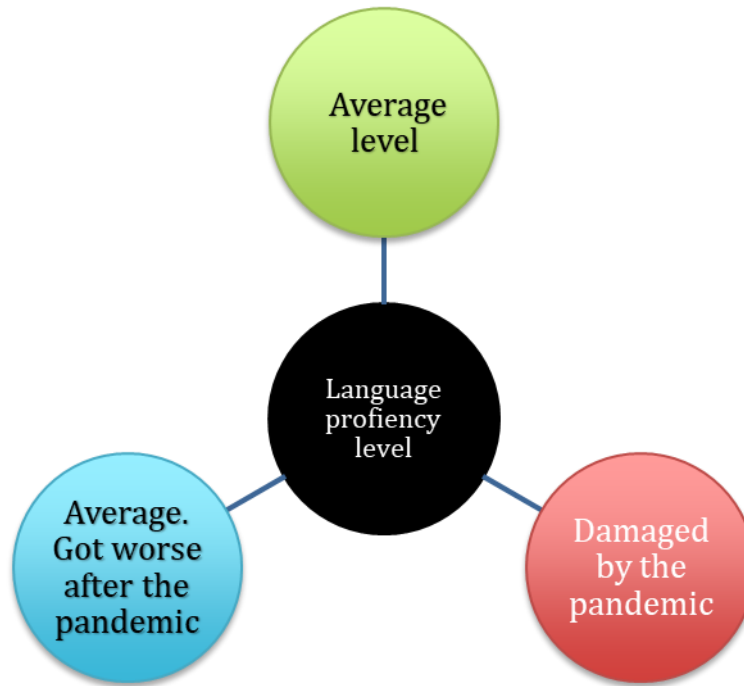
them. In short, students cannot expect external motivation if they do not have intrinsic one. On the other hand, students' complaint was that teachers never motivated them. The main complaint from some of my classmates back then was that teachers most of the time never acknowledged their work.

During their Target Language courses some teachers did not provide them with some kind of feedback or a little recognition for their work or efforts, perhaps only once or twice each semester at best, which sometimes undermined their intrinsic motivation. To summarize, there might be occasions when students will simply lack the intrinsic motivation to do anything and it is fine if teachers do not want to deal with them, but they can surely help students, who are already motivated, occasionally with giving feedback or good remarks on their work.

#### **4.2.5 Learners' proficiency level**

Participants once again shared their thoughts on their students' current proficiency level, giving more detailed answers. Some answers were unexpected.

**Fig.4. LEI teachers' opinions on LEI students' proficiency**



Leopold and Daphne agreed that their students' proficiency was usually good, however, only in informal contexts. Daphne provided more information about this, saying that most students of Target Language IV were not able to use the language to communicate effectively, especially in formal situations. As an example, she mentioned that they were not able to defend an opinion. B1 users can comprehend the key ideas of plain standard input on well-known topics frequently met at work, in school, at leisure. In addition, can concisely explain the causes and justifications for beliefs and goals while describing experiences, events, dreams, hopes, and objectives. On the other hand, B2 users can comprehend the major concepts of complicated texts on both concrete and abstract issues, including technical talks in their area of expertise. Can communicate with a level of spontaneity and fluency that allows frequent interaction. (Council of Europe, 2001). With this information it can only be inferred that most students at Target Language IV are still B1 and that there might be few

who are B2 and even a few who are A2. Another point mentioned by Daphne and Octavius, which was unexpected, was that students' proficiency was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned previously in chapter II, the pandemic had a different effect on how well students learned due to many reasons, such as, poor resources, distractors at home, the lack of observable evidence, difficulties when assessing, among others.

### **4.3 Conclusions**

This chapter presented the categorization of the data analysis. Despite the similarity in some of the participants' answers they still disagreed in some aspects of giving feedback to students. According to the theoretical framework, a combination of all the terms seen so far are vital to the successfully achievement of language proficiency and some teachers might miss some of these steps. However, there it has been discovered that more factors impede LEI students to develop and achieve B2 level, for instance, their lack of intrinsic motivation in some cases, and that the COVID-19 pandemic has damaged more their proficiency level.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.0 Introduction

The final chapter of this study presents an overall summary of the study, followed by the answers to the research questions derived from the study. After this are the limitations of the study, the recommendations, the conclusion and finally my personal reflection on this research project as a novice English teacher and researcher in the field.

This study was conducted at *Facultad de Lenguas, BUAP*. The respondents were 3 teachers from the *Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés*. The study employed qualitative research and used a case study method. The data were obtained through a questionnaire. The study was conducted during the spring semester of 2023.

### 5.1 Summary of the study

The findings of the study were summarized according to the statement of the problem stated in Chapter I which was that some LEI students may not achieve the required level of competency, which is B2, or their improvement may be minimal. Therefore, this could cause issues when doing their professional practice and finding employment. The objectives of this study were to identify the perceptions of LEI teachers on the role of feedback and assessment on the proficiency level of LEI students at the end of Target Language IV, and to explain why, in their opinion, students did not achieve the required level B2 at the end of the course through the three research questions as listed next:

- **RQ 1: According to LEI teachers, what effect has feedback on students' proficiency?**

First, all the participant's answers were not clearly stated: I try to help them towards an understanding of what they need to learn in order to improve" (Leopold), "I always comment about my students' work in a very respectful way and students know it" (Daphne) and "My feedback is only based on the error or mistakes"(Octavius) were the answers the participants gave when answered the questionnaire, so it is, indeed, a little difficult to know for certain what is the exact impact feedback has on LEI students, if it is positive or negative or if it is useful or not. However, despite the lack of information, this first research question showed that feedback is considered an important tool when evaluating student learning since all three participants provided it to their students, regardless of the different reasons they had for giving feedback.

- **RQ 2: What type of assessment do LEI teachers believe is better suited to enhancing students' proficiency?**

Once again, the lack of richer information prevented to give deeper insights about which type of assessment is better for improvement, in fact, only the third participant, Daphne, explained why she used her selected type of assessment. She considered formative assessment the most important since it helped students to improve. Participant I, Leopold, said he was unfamiliar with these terms, and Octavius, participant II, mentioned he used a variety of types. In short, it can be assumed now that formative assessment was considered the most appropriate type of assessment since most respondents chose it.

- **RQ 3: According to LEI teachers, what stops pupils from achieving a B2 level?**

Finally, all three participants agreed that the lack of motivation from students is the main impediment to achieve the required level of proficiency. Again, it is not quite clear why they said this, however, Daphne gave some insights about why LEI students lack motivation: “I have told them that there is a lot to do since they have should be reading only in English, listen and watch series in English and doing all that is necessary to be able to get a better grade”. Her answer might not be clear, but it can be inferred that despite the multiple options she gave to her students to learn, they just did not follow them. Clear evidence of lack of intrinsic motivation.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

This project started with a prospect of having more participants and conduct an interview with each one, however, due to Covid-19 some changes had to be made. After the pandemic, teachers were exposed to the online modality which made more difficult to contact them. Furthermore, the respondents were very busy due to this new teaching modality that the number of participants was reduced to three in total. In addition, conducting interviews were not an option due to the lack of availability of the participants, so the instrument changed into a questionnaire. During the data collection some respondents were not willing to participate in the research so other participants had to be found.

## **5.3 Directions for further research**

Doing this research helped me to have an idea of why students do not reach a B2 level, however, I consider it is still not quite clear the reasons why this happens. It would be

appropriate continuing this investigation by conducting interviews next time and with more participants, so more specific and detailed answers can be obtained. Perhaps, during a holiday or on a vacation period when LEI teachers and students have more spare time. In addition, ask LEI students their opinions on this phenomenon: To identify their perceptions on the impact of feedback and assessment on their proficiency level and what is preventing them to improve and achieve the required level.

#### **5.4 Final conclusions**

In conclusion, LEI students not achieving B2 level is something that may happened in earlier generations; however, it is present nowadays and perhaps even worse than before. We cannot deny that something is not right. This investigation revealed that despite of LEI teachers doing their best to help their students, some of them do not do their part during the learning process. So far, we can see that LEI teachers do their part by doing classwork, assessing students, and giving them feedback. However, we cannot dismiss the possibility that some LEI teachers might be forgetting to apply useful tools, such as, wide variety of teaching methods, classroom activities, and most importantly, giving feedback. Feedback practices in LEI could be improved if LEI teachers become more aware of the impact that feedback may have on their students.

#### **5.5 Reflections as a researcher**

Now that I am an English teacher myself and after finishing this investigation, I reflected on how I used to be during my college degree as a student. Writing and analyzing chapter IV made me realize that students, in general, expect too much of their teachers. I believe that most students expect to learn the language without them doing anything and if they do not learn, somehow it is the teachers' fault. I used to think that way when I was in college. I



complained about teachers' work and learning methods being boring, not showing enough interest in our process, some of them not giving feedback. In short, I used to blame them for my poor proficiency development. However, now I know that learning does not work like that, students must work and practice on their own outside class hours. Learning means teamwork between teachers and students and if either of those parties do not work, then the results will not be the best.

In conclusion, now that I am a teacher and I have some cases of students with the same problem, which is low proficiency development, I can finally relate to teachers that is not our obligation inspire or motivate learners, that now it is obvious who wants to learn and who does not and that we will work with the students who want to learn.

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## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

### PERCEPTIONS OF LEI TEACHERS ON THEIR ENGLISH LEVEL PROFICIENCY AT THE END OF TARGET LANGUAGE IV QUESTIONNAIRE

**Level of Target Language:**

**Years of experience at language teaching:**

**Gender:**

#### **Introduction**

LEI students are expected to achieve a B2 level by the end of Target Language IV, as a requirement to complete their master's degree. This questionnaire aims to explore how the students develop their language proficiency during their English course and the perceptions teachers have about their students' proficiency development.

#### **Instructions**

Please complete the following questionnaire by giving long answers and explaining them as detailed and honestly as possible. Make sure to read the whole question carefully before you respond. All information will be kept confidential. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

1. During your English classes, what kind of activities do you normally do? Describe them briefly.
2. What types of assessment do you use in your courses? Please, choose your answer(s).

Summative	Formative	Diagnostic	Other
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3. Which types of assessment do you think are helpful for students' improvement? Why? (If you chosed "Other", please write it down).
4. When providing feedback, how would you describe your comments towards your students' performance or outcomes? Why?

5. Regarding the communicative competence, how do you engage students to develop it?
6. What do you think is preventing students to achieve a B2 level?
7. What is your opinion of LEI students' proficiency?
8. What recommendations would you give to future LEI generations so they can achieve a B2 level?