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Causes of failure in the English courses from the students' perspective: the case of the 2004 generation of the English Language Major at Uqroo

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Abstract

We have witnessed that at the Universidad de Quintana Roo there was a high rate of failure in the English courses during the generation 2004-2009 in the BA English language program. The aim of this study was to investigate from the students' perspective the causes of failure in the English courses: the case of the 2004 generation of the BA English Language program.

The participants were the UQROO students that entered the BA English language program in 2004 and who failed an English course at any level from I to VIII. There were 22 participants: 12 women and 10 men. Their ages ranged from 22 to 30 years. As a case study, the instruments used were self- reported questionnaires and semi-directed interviews to some of the students.

The results showed that most of the students did not have an intrinsic motivation to reach a successful learning. On the contrary they reflected to have an extrinsic motivation influenced by the economical benefit that was represented by the major in their future careers. Regarding assessment, even though the way of assessing their learning was changed in that generation, this did not affect them. Assessment was not found to be influential regarding failure. However, a lack of motivation of any kind affected negatively students' performance resulting in a low grade no matter if the way of assessing is changed. Moreover, most of the students reported that they were conscious of their learning process and performance through out their school year.

In conclusion, motivation was seen as a factor of failure. First because students were interested in the economical benefit, as a result, were not academically interested in their learning thus and did not show enough effort during the courses. Besides that, assessment was also seen as a factor of failure. Due to the change of grading from an integrated (together) to a segregated way separately), students were affected because they were left behind and the extreme some dropped out.

1. Introduction

There are some universities in Quintana Roo but most of them offer mainly bachelor's programs related to the common economical activity in the region, which is tourism. The Universidad de Quintana Roo (UQROO) located in Chetumal, the capital city, is one of the most prestigious public university in the state. This institution offers higher education options such as: Social Anthropology, Law, Economy and Finances, Nursing, Pharmacy, Medicine, Humanities, Environmental Engineering, Network Engineering, International Relations, Natural Resources Management, Public Safety, Commercial Systems, Alternative Tourism. One of the most popular majors is the English Language program, whose aim is to train teachers of English as a foreign language.

The BA English Language program is focused on training students to be EFL teachers. This program consists of ten quarters to be completed. Each year approximately 60 out of 120 students who apply for the program are accepted only if they pass the EXANI-II (El Exámen Nacional de Ingreso a la Educación Superior). This is a selective test which aim is to measure applicants' abilities and basic knowledge to start college in Mexico. This is just the beginning of a careful process of selection at the university. In the first phase, before starting the normal period of enrollment, all of them have to take an introductory course called "Programa de Introducción a la Universidad" (PIU) which is compulsory for everyone; it takes around one month and this is done with the objective of letting students get to know the school, the buildings, the way of teaching, their classmates and their teachers. This phase is crucial, since if a student fails this introductory course will not be able to register for the English program.

As it was stated, the program lasts five years. During the first quarter, students are required to take general courses such as, Mathematics, Logic, Psychology, Research Methodology in Social and Humanity Sciences, Spanish Reading and Writing. English courses are not required until the next quarter, through ninth quarter. English is taught as the main subject and is requirement not only for the successive courses of English, but for other content courses taught in English.

This means, that passing English leads the students to the next level and allows them to take other subjects that are required. On the contrary, if the students fail they will not be able to sign up for other subjects and even lose a school year.

This is the main barrier students face along the program and a high amount of failure was showed. The key motive to this research is to seek the essential factor of failure. In this thesis, our lines of research are motivation and assessment. The first one because motivation is needed in any of the activities humans begin to perform in life. The second one because in the third quarter of the English program of the 2004-2009 generation, the way of assessing was changed from an integrated grading to a segregated grading. Both factors are believed to affect students' performance since 60 were accepted in the first semester but only 15 of those graduated in 2009.

One way to approach it is through a case study. Hinkel (2005) defines a case study as:

> "… specific persons, places, or events that are interesting and worthy of intensive study. The case is a real-life entity that operates in a specific time and place. Whether or not the contextual boundaries can be easily drawn, case study is contextual study, unfolding over time and in real setting. Often the phenomena of interest become visible as the case study proceeds; surprising facts come to light and demand attention." (p.205)

Since case studies focus on context, change over time, and specific learners or groups, therefore, when we want to understand how a specific unit (in our thesis the students from the 2004 generation of the English language major) functions in the real world over a significant period of time. Therefore as part of that generation, our experience was the source of inspiration to do this study.

1.1 General objective

To investigate the reasons of failure among the 2004-2009 generation in the BA English language program at University of Quintana Roo, considering motivation and assessment as the particular areas of research.

1.1.1 Specific objectives

- To analyze the motivational factors that affected students' performance in the English courses and led to failure.
- To analyze the assessment factors that affected students' performance in the English courses and led to failure.

1.2 Justification

The following study investigates one of the most common and least desirable issues in education: failure. This research will approach the problem from the students' perspective.

There has not been a research at the Universidad de Quintanta Roo (UQROO) that has attempted to investigate the impact of these two factors. Certainly these factors have been studied separately in other works. Therefore this makes the project more interesting, novel and it is also a real and current topic that has affected students for years: more specifically, to the 2004 generation due to changes in the way of assessment.

This research will offer important results since it is mainly a qualitative study which allows a deeper analysis of the problem. By hearing students' own views about failure, we can add their voices to the dialogue with instructors and the findings of this study can shed some light on the problem of failure in the Bachelor's program. First, this will help them realize why there were a lot of students who failed the courses and what were the causes. Second, they could take advantage of the results and make something to prevent this problem. Maybe some of the solutions could be changing the teaching methods used in class or to make emphasis on how to motivate students. On the other hand,

students can also benefit from this study by avoiding those factors that negatively affect their performance and to improve the ones that help their learning.

1.3 Research Questions

Since we are focusing on two areas: assessment and motivation, our research questions are formulated in relation to those.

- ❖ How does motivation affect the students' performance in the English courses?
- ❖ How does the way of assessing affect failure of the English courses?

2. Literature review

In terms of motivation Chang (1999) made a research in Taiwan about learning motivation in a junior high school in English as a Foreign Language context. It was made in a public junior high school during the first semester of the 1998-99. English was taught as a major subject and it is a required course through all the three school years. This study adapted a recent view in educational psychology that motivation is goal-directed behavior in the classroom context. Chang (1999) stated that this view of motivation is more educational-centered and pedagogically oriented than Lambert and Gardner's predominant social psychological view of second language learning motivation. For that reason the findings of the study provided applications that are more specific to the EFL classroom.

The study's goal was to investigate student's motivation in relation to specific classroom structures and students' confidence in their abilities. This study combines the qualitative with the quantitative method. Questionnaires were used to measure student's motivational goal orientations. Classroom observation, interviews to students and teachers, and documents were used to collect qualitative data.

The findings show that students had both mastery and performance goals, but these were associated to parental influence and fear of negative consequences of failure in school. They were also found to attach both the intrinsic and extrinsic values to learning English, by having intrinsic reasons for learning as going abroad students are likely to adopt mastery goals. On the other hand, Chang explains that with extrinsic reasons such as examinations and requirements students are likely to adopt performance goals.

According to Chang, two out of the six classes that were in the project were selected for a qualitative case study. Both classrooms were highly performance-structured and publicly evaluated, promoting interpersonal comparison among students. Students' individual differences in ability and confidence in their ability were found to mediate students' motivational and

classroom behaviors. Low achievers with a low confidence in their abilities were negatively influenced by the performance-oriented classroom structures more so than their high abilities counterparts.

Additionally, Cheng (2008) made a research about motivational issues for Taiwanese vocational high school students in English as a foreign language classroom. This was made in order to explore low-achieving language learners' motivation, with the infusion of cooperative learning instruction in an EFL classroom in Taiwan. According to Cheng there were 47 participants of different gender and age and academic majors who were identified as a low-achieving English learners in school according to the Basic Competence Junior High School Entrance Examination (BCT) by the Ministry of Education.

This study implemented both qualitative and quantitative research methods. For the qualitative approach individual students' interview, classroom observation, student artifacts and weekly research journals were used. For the quantitative section a statistical analysis test and repeated measures analysis of variance were used. The results were that practicing the Group Investigation Method (GI) teaching skill model applied in the context increase student's motivation to learn a language.

More recently, Flemens (2009) conducted a research about motivation, language learning strategies, and course performance among English-speaking college students learning a romance language. Flemens explained that as a consequence of that only the 8% of the American college students study a foreign language, at many secondary schools the foreign language classes were reduced from four to two years, this is why the number of students exposed to foreign language learning is reduced.

It is also argued in this research that language-learning strategy use and motivation have been found to correlate highly with language proficiency. This study examined the relationship between language-learning strategies, motivation, and expected course grades of English-speaking college students learning a romance language. The entire accessible population of

approximately 256 English-speaking college students learning a romance language was invited to participate in a non-experimental, quantitative, exploratory and explanatory study. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used to measure frequency of student language-learning strategy use. The three subscales, Motivational Intensity, Desire to Learn the Language, and Attitudes toward Learning the Language, developed by Gardner in 1985 measured students' Motivation.

Results indicated that both the Motivation (.94) and the SILL (.93) scales were reliable for measuring the motivation and frequency of language-learning strategy use of respondents. Factor analysis were conducted to test for the emergence of six factors and to establish construct validity for the SILL and for the Motivation scales.

Motivational Intensity was the strongest explanatory variable for the total SILL as well as for the breakdown of the subscales. The results revealed that female respondents did have higher frequencies of use of language-learning strategies than their male counterparts except for Compensation and Affective strategies.

Assessment is the key for students to go further or stay and repeat a course. Therefore teachers must be aware of the great importance of assessment. There exist some studies that are related to our topic, and these are summarized below.

Koun (2005), conducted a research in Tokyo about the beliefs that students have regarding failure. He asserts that failure in English language learning is universal and it seems to be a serious issue for students of English and in English education as a whole. However, little attention has been paid to investigating the real causes of their failure. This research reported the findings of a small-scale research study conducted with adult students aged 18 to 25 about their perceived causes (attributions) of their failure in studying English at a private language school in Cambodia. He used as an instrument for collecting the data, a semi-structured interview. The data analysis was based on the

interpretive way pattern and the frequent categories of attributions: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck (Weiner, 1979).

The results indicated that those students recognized both external and internal dimensions of attributions to their failure. For the external dimension, the common attributions were task difficulty, teaching, and school administration/management, while ability and effort were the most commonly reported for the internal dimension. Learning environment/pressure, family, motivation, and anxiety were found in the study. The findings suggest that these attributions are believed to have a very strong relationship with the students' expectations, motivation, and affective domains for their future success in learning English. The results also suggest implications for teachers to cope with the students attributions to enhance their motivation and expectancies for future success.

Another research was developed by Gobel and Setsuko (2007), who investigated the perceived reasons for success and failure on actual language learning tasks in both oral communication and reading classes, looking at how learners judge their success and failure, and their range of attributions.

A questionnaire was created based on attribution theory focusing on the attributions of ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck and was administered to 233 Japanese first-year university students. A significant relationship between exam scores and the attributions of ability, task difficulty and likes was found, with attributions for failure focusing on internal causes and attributions for success on external causes.

Undoubtedly, motivation has been a field of research that has been analyzed in different contexts, subjects and levels of education. In the same way assessment has also been research in several means. But it does not exist any research that encompasses both factors. Due to this, the research for similar studies, regarding our topic, was limited. We could not find case studies that involved motivation and assessment in Mexico but in places such as Asia some studies were found but the factors were seen separately.

3. Theoretical Framework

When we, as students, decide to start university, we do it with the idea of finishing it on the time established; but sometimes we face several situations in which factors such as motivation, assessment, teacher's personality, anxiety, habits, learning strategies, school failure and others, affect our performance at school.

There are several changes in the switching from high school to university. It is well documented that for many students the transition to university is fraught with problems (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). The pressure teachers exert on students at the university is usually much more than at high school and not because the teachers press students all the time, but because the work students need to do requires more concentration and also more time spent on searching for information. For this reason, students often face troubles when they enter the university because they have to adapt their way of studying or their learning strategies to the new demands. This is something the majority of the students find it hard to do because they do not have the habit of spending a lot of time doing homework or they do not know the strategies to learn a new language.

During the school year, students' performance can result in school success or school failure or to the extreme of dropping out. School performance can be defined as a continuation in a ladder, where success is on one end and failure on the other (Paraskevopoulos, 1985).

Most of the success and failure depend on the effort a student makes to reach the language achievement. In other words, the student's effort is essential since his commitment to the language learning process will determine his performance. According to Papadopoulos (1990), the definition of school failure can be ambiguous, since it not only entails the student's failure, but also that of the educational system as it has not successfully met the student needs.

In the same vein, Psacharopoulos (2007) declares that school failure may mean that a school system is failing to provide services conducing to learning, or that a student is failing to advance to the next grade and eventually becomes a drop out. This means that any student or any educational system has their own objectives, and not reaching these aims is known as failure. The problem of school failure is of great importance, as it affects mostly students who have difficulties in the process of learning, and becomes an obstacle to a large part of this segment vulnerable population from making full use of their educational opportunities to improve their social status. Therefore, the consequences of school failure are economic, social, professional, educational and cultural.

Additionally, it is widely documented that educational difficulties, failure and drop-out are connected to adverse reaction on the part of youth. According to Vazsomyi & Flannery (1997), it has also been proven that students who find learning very difficult and cannot follow teaching techniques, try to find classmates who have the same learning abilities and behavior and get together in a study group.

Several factors, either positive or negative, that affect students' performance during their learning process have been documented and certainly they are all important, however this research will focus only on two factors: motivation and assessment. On one hand, motivation has been proven to be present in every action a person does in life, and studying is an action that needs to have motivation to be completed or achieved. That is why motivation has been chosen, for it to be analyzed and see if this is a factor that influenced our participants. On the other hand, assessment was taken into account because in the school years of the participants, an important change in the way of assessing occurred, from an integrated skill grading to a segregated skill grading, and one objective is to look into this event as a factor affecting students.

3.1 Motivation

Motivation plays an important role in the learning of a language. For teachers it is probably something that gets the interest of students so that they enjoy the class, activities or environment in which they are participating. According to Dörnyei (2007:1), motivation is:

> "an abstract, hypothetical concept that we use to explain why people think and behave as they do."

According to this author, motivation is related to one of the most basic aspects of the human mind and it has a very important role in determining success or failure in any learning situation. An example of this, as Dörnyei places it, this term is commonly used by teachers to describe successful and unsuccessful learners. When a student is said to be motivated, it is generally assumed that this person is a committed and an enthusiastic learner who has good reasons for learning, who studies with vigor and intensity and who demonstrates perseverance. Thus this term is used instead of listing all the possible attributes to this person.

Motivation is one of the many human characteristics that influence the students' behavior together with other characteristics such as curiosity, and values, as Henson (1999) states. It is also defined as the interest of the student to do the work and to learn the academic resource. Dörnyei (2007:7) states that:

> "Because human behavior has two basic dimensions – direction and magnitude (intensity) – motivation by definition concerns both of these: the choice of a particular action; the effort expended on it and the persistence with it. Consequently, motivation describes the reasons why people chose to do something, how hard they are going to pursue it and the durable willing to sustain the activity."

3.1.1 Types of Motivation

According to Ellis (1997), various kinds of motivation have been identified: extrinsic motivation, integrative motivation, resultative motivation and intrinsic motivation. These different types try to describe how the motivation works depending on the situation and factors that influence us to do things in our behavior or our actions. These are described below.

3.1.1.1 Extrinsic Motivation

Ellis (1997) states that extrinsic motivation, also known as instrumental motivation, refers to the effort a student makes to learn a language for some functional reasons; to pass an examination, to get a better job, or to get a place in a university. In the same vein, Cook (2001) claims that extrinsic motivation means learning a language from an ulterior motive unrelated to its use by native speakers. It is the one whose objective is to learn the language for a career goal or other practical reasons. For instance, learners are motivated to learn a language because it opens up educational and economic opportunities for them.

Henson (1999), states that extrinsic motivation also depends on external rewards like grades or privileges. For instance, Student A might be motivated to get better grades as results of the teacher's decision of giving a break during classes as an incentive to advanced students. Or Student B could also be extrinsically motivated to get good grades in an exam because as an incentive his parents will let him drive the car.

3.1.1.2 Integrative Motivation

Integrative motivation reflects whether the student identifies himself with the target language culture and people in some sense, or rejects them. According to Ellis (1997), some learners may choose to learn a particular L2 because they are interested in the people and the culture represented by the target-language

group. This means that integrative is the kind of motivation that we use when we want to learn a language in order to be part of the culture of its people.

3.1.1.3 Resultative Motivation

Ellis (1997) points out that resultative motivation refers to the motivation seen as a cause or a result. This means that motivation can be the cause of the language achievement; however, this can also be the result of learning. For example, a person who has acquired a certain level of performance in a language and has done well in all the tasks he/she has been asked to do, is motivated by the good work he/she has done. On the other hand it can be said that the person's level of performance was achieved by the motivation he/she had during her process of reaching that level of performance.

3.1.1.4 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation, as Ellis (1997) defines it, involves the arousal and maintenance of curiosity and can ebb and flow as a result of such factors as learner's particular interests and the extent to which they feel personally involved in learning activities. In this case, learners do not hold distinct attitudes, positive or negative, toward the target language group. Similarly, Burden (1997) explains that intrinsic motivation is present when doing an activity generates interest and enjoyment. He also states that the reason for the activity to be done lies in the activity itself.

In the same line of reasoning Sprinthall (1996) explains that for intrinsic motivation to happen, there is the need to have an external reinforcement at the beginning of the process, but once it is initiated it remains in an autonomous form, so that an authentic, stable and lasting learning process is produced. Sprinthall (1996) also states that a person that is intrinsically motivated to perform a specific activity can do an extra effort to face different situations, no matter how difficult they might be.

Motivation is clearly a complex phenomenon, and it is easier to describe it than to define it. According to Ellis (1997) all these types of motivation mentioned before should be seen as complementary rather than oppositional. In addition, Ellis states that motivation is not something that a learner has or does not; instead it is something that varies from one moment to the next. This means that one day a person can be highly motivated to do something and the next day he/she can be de-motivated to perform the task.

Over the time, motivation has been classified in types according to the specific needs or situations in which this is involved, however there have also been approaches linked to this topic that are closely related to the types of motivation and are useful for a better understanding of how motivation affects the human behavior.

3.1.2 Motivation Approaches

According to Henson (1999), there are three general approaches of motivation, the behaviorist, the cognitive, (the attribution theory, the achievement's motivation theory, and the social cognition theory), and the humanist. Below is presented an overview of these since all of these theories are related and contribute to the understanding of what motivates students. A more in- depth analysis of the cognitive approach is presented since this has been chosen as the theoretical perspective for the present study.

3.1.2.1 The Behaviorist approach

The behaviorist approach is based on the concept of explaining behavior through observation. It also considers that our environment is what causes us to behave differently (Psychologist World & partners 2006-2009). In this approach, as Henson (1999) states, concepts like *reinforcement, conditioning and the punishment alternatives* are highlighted. The use of reinforcement to increase or decrease behavior can also be applied to motivation. Obtaining reinforcement or avoiding punishment motivates people to work harder or to have a good performance.

Following Henson (1999), there exist two types of reinforcements: primary reinforcements like food, water that satisfy basic physiological needs and the secondary reinforcements like compliments, grades, and money, that work as reinforcements because they are associated with the primary reinforcements.

Henson also points out that for behaviorists, what motivates students is the possibility to obtain reinforcements, loving to learn can be included as well. The behaviorist approach is often related with the extrinsic motivation, which lies on the external rewards, like grades, or privilege.

According to Psychologist World & partners (2006-2010), the behaviorist approach assumes that we are able to understand people by observing their behavior. It is also stated that this can be noted in terms of responses to certain stimuli. For instance, a person being asked to hold a glass of water (stimulus) would respond by holding the glass of water. In other words, the stimulus-response theory promotes conditioning, and this indicates that learning in humans and animals can take place through associating a response to a stimulus.

The behaviorist approach also assumes that people are born as a blank slate and that we are equal at birth. What makes us behave differently are the environmental factors rather than genetic or biological differences. However, the Humanist approach leaves aside the stimulus-response fact and takes into consideration the human as himself, the feelings, needs and emotions people need in order to have a successful personal growth.

3.1.2.2 The Humanist Approach

This type of approach focuses on the intrinsic motivation of students. Affective characteristics of people are taken into consideration. The humanist approach emphasizes the human side of learning and the necessity of the consideration of choices, needs, and the personal growth by the teacher (Henson, 1999).

Moreover, as Simons (1987) adds, humanists do not agree that mechanical forces, either of stimuli or reinforcement as in the case of behaviorism push and pull human beings. Rather, humanists focus on potentials, and believe that humans strive for an upper level of capabilities. Humans seek the frontier of creativity, the highest reaches of consciousness and wisdom.

In addition, Henson (1999) states that one of the most recognized theories into the humanist approach is the Maslow theory of needs. According to this theory, tension is created by experimenting unsatisfied needs and therefore people try to reach goals that allow them to reduce or to eliminate this tension. Maslow believed that the main principle of the development lies on the necessity gratification.

Henson (1999) explains that Maslow developed a hierarchy of five human basic needs:

- **The physiological needs:** These are biological needs, which include oxygen, feeding, sleeping and shelter.
- **The safety needs:** Adults are not usually aware of their security needs except in times of emergency. Children are the ones that often display the signs of insecurity and the needs to be safe, free of danger, anxiety and threat.
- **The needs of Love, affection and belongingness (also known as social needs):** This involves both giving and receiving love, affection, and the sense of belonging of parents, teachers and classmates.
- **The esteem needs:** This involves both the need of self-esteem and the esteem a person gets from others.
- **The self-actualization needs:** This one refers to the people needs of purpose, personal growth and realization of their potential. This would be their greatest achievement.

Adaptation of Henson (1999: 382)

Maslow (cited by Henson, 1999) explains that people need to satisfy first the inferior needs. If this is not possible, then there will not be any opportunity to satisfy the superior needs. For instance, if students are hungry and sleepy, they will not seek to fulfill the knowledge and comprehension needs.

Henson (1999) describes that these needs are cyclic. Thus the satisfied needs will not stay satisfied forever, that is why it is necessary that people continue to satisfy their needs, for example to continue eating to satisfy hunger. A different view emerged considering the human beings but this approach focuses on the processes that occur mentally in every single person.

3.1.2.3 The Cognitive Approach

According to Bower & Hilgard (1996:521),

> "the cognitive approach deals with mental processes like memory and problem solving. It is interested in the way people know (acquire knowledge about) their world and the way they apply that knowledge to guide decisions and to carry out affective actions."

This type of approach is against the behaviorism because it emphasizes mental processes rather than stimulus-response. The cognitive approach is based on the assumption that the perceptions and thoughts of people regarding the activities or events influence on their way of responding (Henson, 1999).

The cognitive approach suggests that developing a satisfactory performance of students' motivation does not only depend on rewards, but on factors of interest, curiosity, necessity to obtain information or to solve a problem, or the wish to understand. Bandura (1986) states that the level of students' motivation to social interaction, and academy success, receives the influence of the class environment, the teacher's, classmates and parents attitudes .He also highlights the importance of factors like perception and feelings. Within this approach we can find the a) attribution theory, b) the achievement motivation theory and c) the social cognitive theory.

3.1.2.3.1 Attribution theory

The origin of motivation is the quest of comprehension, or an attempt to understand why the events happen (Weiner, 1979). Weiner developed a theory called attribution theory in order to explain the way students respond questions about the causes of their success of failure. He claims that the fact the teacher knows how their students answer those questions can influence their future performance. And also to understand what the student's attributions of their success or failure gives the teacher a starting point to work with the student's perceptions.

According to Henson (1999), learners attribute their success or failure to four main causes: ability, task difficulty, effort and luck. These four factors can be defined as follows:

- **Ability** is a reasonably *internal* and *stable* aspect over which the learner *does not exercise much direct control.*

- **Task difficulty** is an *external* and *stable* aspect that is *basically beyond the learner's control.*

- **Effort** is an *internal* and *unstable* aspect over which the student *can exercise a great deal of control.*

- **Luck** is an *external* and *unstable* aspect over which the student exercises *very little control.*

Henson (1999) adds that Weiner classified these four causes (ability, task difficulty, effort and luck) of failure or success in three dimensions.

- The locus of control can be internal or external.

  o In the internal locus of control students believe to be responsible for the behavior and their own success or failure. For example if they pass an exam they believe it was because they studied hard

and have the capacity to learn or that they are good in taking exams. People with a high internal locus of control tend to persist in their assigned tasks and not give up easily.

- In the external locus of control, Weiner states that students believe that their performance is all about luck, the difficulty of tasks or other circumstances out of their control. People that mix a high external locus of control with a lot of failures develop a condition known as *learned helplessness.* The ones that experiment this condition tend to feel that even though they put a lot of effort they cannot avoid failing and therefore at the end they quit studying.

- The *second cause Stability,* as Weiner defines it, can be stable (unchangeable and fixed) or unstable (which changes in different situations).
  - The stable causes include the capacity, the effort, and the task difficulty.
  - In the unstable causes we can find the person's mood and luck.

- The third cause Controllability: the person responsible for the task can control some causes of success and failure.

Generally speaking, an *internal* factor can be *controllable* (we can control our effort by trying harder) or *uncontrollable* (most people cannot easily change their basic intellectual ability or change from being an introvert to being an extrovert). Likewise, an *external* factor can be controllable (a person failing a difficult course could succeed by taking an easier course) or uncontrollable (if calculus is difficult because it is abstract, it will still be abstract no matter what we do).

It is the learner's perception which determines how attributions will influence future effort. Specifically, a learner may believe that he is a "lucky" person, and let us say, for him "luck" is a stable and internal characteristic on which he exercises little control. This means that for this person luck is an "ability" or

personal characteristic. Similarly, a person might believe that she expended a great deal of effort, when in fact she did not, or that an easy task was difficult.

Consequently, the basic principle of the attribution theory as it applies to motivation is that a person's own perceptions or attributions for success or failure determine the amount of effort the person will expend on that activity in the future.

Henson (1999) states that young learners do not understand much about the attribution concepts, but older students frequently understand the causes of success and failure. What it is true is that learners need to believe that working hard in a particular way is what leads to success.

Students will be most persistent at academic tasks under the following circumstances:

If they attribute their academic success to either:
- Internal, unstable, factors over which they have control (effort)
- Internal, stable, factors over which they have little control but which may sometimes be affected by other factors (ability disrupted by occasional bad luck)

3.1.2.3.2 Achievement motivation

The achievement motivation is considered one of the theories that studies motivation with a cognitive point of view. This theory takes into account what occurs inside the person and not only what occurs outside. According to Henson (1999) the theory of achievement motivation defines *motivation* as the actions and feelings related to the fulfillment of any internalized standard excellence. Students with a high achievement motivation tend to have confidence in themselves, to accept the causes of their actions, take calculated risks, or carefully make plans, and save time (DeCharm, 1976). This theory makes a prediction of the academic and life success.

The achievement motivation theory consists of a tendency to approach an achievement goal and the tendency to avoid failure (Atkinson, 1964). Therefore, the tendency of a student to approach an achievement goal is based on three aspects: the goals need, the success probability, and the importance of the task for the student. Furthermore, the tendency towards the student to avoid failure is based on three characteristics; the necessity to avoid failure, the probability to fail the task, and the importance the failure has on the student (Henson, 1999). For instance, let us say that Tommy has a high tendency of approaching an achievement goal, therefore he, in his term paper, will choose a difficult topic, on the other hand, he will choose an easy topic if his tendency to avoid failure is high.

As Henson states, when students fail in a task and have a high achievement motivation, this experience will only increase their motivation because they will want to be better. But if the students have a low achievement motivation, failing in the task will decrease their motivation for fear of making a mistake. The success also increases motivation on the student with a low achievement motivation since this student wants to continue succeeding.

3.1.2.3.3 Social Cognitive Theory

This theory was developed by Dweck (1986), who states that the Social Cognitive Approach concentrates on beliefs people have about their own intelligence. It encloses four areas: the Notion people have about intelligence, Student's goals, Confidence and Behavior patterns.

- **Notions people have about intelligence.** This means, as Henson (1999) states, that people might think that their intelligence is fixed, and cannot change, which describes a *stock-still notion* of intelligence. On the other hand, people can believe that their intelligence is malleable and therefore can change, this is the *dynamic notion*.

- **Students' goals.** Students can have *performance goals* in which they desire to have positive opinions or to avoid negatives valuations about their performance. They also can have l*earning goals* in which they pretend to increase comprehension, performance or try to dominate a new skill (Henson, 1999).

- *Confidence*, the one people have in respect with their abilities, and it can be high or low.

- *Behavior patterns.* People can have behavior patterns such as adaptive or control oriented which are characterized by actions that seek challenge and persistence when any obstacle is faced. With the adaptive or control oriented, the student enjoys the effort he makes to dominate any task. On the other hand the maladjusted or helpless people are characterized to avoid difficult tasks; they tend to show negative emotions, like anxiety when facing difficult tasks.

Dweck (1986) affirms that the behavior patterns of students oriented towards either the control or helpless pattern have deep effects on the students' academic performance.

 In sum, motivation is a main factor that influences student's learning process; a person can present different types of motivation at once. Types of motivations are to be seen as a whole rather than individually. Following this further, three different approaches to motivation theories were found: the Behaviorist which highlights concepts like reinforcement, conditioning and punishment alternatives. It states that in order for a student to be motivated a possible reinforcement has to exist like grades, rewards, or privilege. On the contrary, there is the Humanist Approach which focuses on intrinsic motivation, affective characteristics and potentials of humans. A very important theory in this approach is The Maslow Theory of Needs which explains that a tension is created by experimenting unsatisfied needs and people try to reach goals that allow them to reduce or eliminate this tension. These needs are cyclic and so the satisfied needs will not permanence satisfied forever. And finally the

Cognitive approach which emphasizes mental processes rather than stimulus response like behaviorists. This approach depends on factors as curiosity, interest, and necessity to obtain information or to solve a problem. In this approach three different theories are integrated: Attribution theory, Achievement motivation and Social Cognitive theory, these three theories share proposals that take into account what happens inside people and not only from the outside.

The research that is presented in this work is focused on the cognitive approach due to the mental processes it takes into account, such as memory and problem solving. This approach is also interested in the way people apply knowledge to situations and decisions, it highlights factors like ability, luck, task difficulty and effort in which students might have control or not. It also discusses the beliefs students have about themselves and their learning processes. How they react regarding success or failure. Therefore we have chosen this approach.

The other factor that may cause failure in the English courses is the way of assessing, to which we turn in the following section.

3.2 Assessment

First of all, it is important to know that assessment, evaluation and testing are not the same. Let us see below some definitions and more detailed descriptions of each one of them.

3.2.1 Evaluation vs. testing.

It is believed that evaluation is the same as testing, and while students are being tested, evaluation is taking place. However, testing is only one component in the evaluation process. In terms of human beings, testing tells what level of knowledge or skill has been acquired. According to Rea-Dickins (1992), evaluation is an indispensable part of teaching and learning. It is essential for the teacher because it can provide a lot of information to use for

the future direction of classroom practice, for the planning of courses, and for the management of learning tasks and students.

Rea-Dickins (1992) also states that evaluation is to assess or appraise. Evaluation is the process of examining a subject and rating it based on its important features. We determine how much or how little we value something, arriving at our judgment on the basis of criteria that we can define. She adds that we evaluate when we write primarily because it is almost impossible to avoid doing so. If right now you were asked to write for five minutes on any subject and were asked to keep your writing completely value-free, you would probably find such an assignment difficult. Readers come to evaluative writing in part because they seek the opinions of other people for one reason or another.

Since we are focusing on assessment, it is vital to define it. As reported by the Academic Exchange Quarterly (2008), *educational assessment* is the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. Assessment can focus on the individual learner, the learning community (class, workshop, or other organized group of learners), the institution, or the educational system as a whole.

3.2.2 Purpose of assessment

Conforming to Cohen (1994), the primary purpose of assessment is **for the student** to receive multiple attempts to practice and to demonstrate understanding of content and to develop skills by receiving specific and timely feedback by the teacher in order to improve achievement.

The author also claims that the primary purpose of assessment is **for the teacher** to analyze student progress for the purpose of modifying and refining the teaching/learning cycle to better meet student needs.

3.2.3 Assessing language ability in the classroom.

The assessment of students' language abilities is something on which teachers spend a fair amount of class time in one way or another. Cohen (1994), states that the assessment tasks are nonthreatening and are developmental in nature, allowing the learners ample opportunities to demonstrate what they know and do not know, and providing useful feedback for both the learners and their teachers.

For several, traditional "testing" has been viewed as a fairly disliked area of language teaching and learning. Cohen (1994:2), points out:

> "students have sometimes viewed tests as unfair measures of their language ability and have feared that they would not perform well on them. Teachers have sometimes felt reluctant to construct classroom tests and have not been altogether satisfied with their results when they have engaged in test construction."

It is worth to mention that, considering our case study, in the English courses of the 2004 generation the process of assessment changed in English III, in Spring 2006. At the beginning, in the courses of English I and English II teachers evaluated the language skills: reading, speaking, writing, listening and use of English (grammar) and averaged them to have the final grade. This means that if you reached the 70% (minimum passing grade) you were able to pass the course. For example, if you failed *listening* but you had an excellent grade in *writing*, and you could reach at least a 70%, therefore you could pass the course.

> According to Montalvo (2009:6)
> "To the view of members of the faculty, that grade would not reflect the real competence they hand in English or the specific area where students were having problems; therefore, the evaluation criteria changed to one based on the language skills"

Therefore, in the following courses the system of assessment changed, teachers began to evaluate students taking into account the skills: listening, reading, speaking, writing and the sub-skill grammar (or use of English) and evaluated them separately, this means that each ability was worth 20%, of the total grade, but if you failed any of those, you failed all the entire course and you had to repeat it in the following quarter.

We believe, according to our experience, this change of evaluating seems to be one of the causes of failure, because if you failed any of the four skills, you failed the entire course. This provoked that several of our classmates dropped out school or fell behind.

3.2.3.1 Why to assess language ability?

There are numerous language learning contexts in which progress is not evaluated in any systematic way. According to Cohen (1994), the language learning classroom marks a context in which progress can, and sometimes must, be evaluated in a logical way. In fact, administrators, parents, teachers, and learners normally expect some form of evaluation of progress.

The author also makes a distinction between assessing a second-language and assessing a foreign-language. In the former, the language being assessed is one that is spoken in the community in which it is being learned. In the latter, the fact that the language being assessed is not spoken in the local community may create problems for assessment.

In our case, we are learning a foreign-language, which may be more difficult because we do not have sufficient opportunities to speak with a native speaker, and we just have the practice in the classroom which most of the time is not enough.

3.2.3.2 What to asses?

Students may not learn what is taught or may learn only partially or even incorrectly. Cohen (1994) claims that sometimes students learn incorrectly because they pay inadequate attention or because they do not have the proper basis for comprehending the material—a basis gained, for instance, from coming to class regularly, doing the homework, or having exposure to the language out of class.

Assessment can provide an opportunity for learners to learn about what they know and do not know, but only if the feedback from assessment is intelligible to them. Since language learners are continually formulating and reformulating hypotheses about the way language works, they can benefit from feedback about the degree to which the hunches, analogies, and generalizations that they have made are correct. Schachter (1983) claims that learners' progress in a target language by testing hypotheses about how the language works, using inferences based on previous knowledge. Moreover, he adds that learners depend on negative input to verify hypotheses about whether their utterances are comprehensible, grammatically correct, or situationally appropriate.

No matter what approach is selected by the teacher, it is well documented that corrective feedback on a test will probably have a limited or nonexistent effect if:
- ✓ The learners do not have enough knowledge of the area being corrected to benefit from the correction.

- ✓ The learners do not have adequate proficiency to understand the teacher's explanation of what they did wrong.

- ✓ The learners have too little knowledge about how the language works to know what question to ask to get clarification.

Given that learners do not necessarily learn what is taught and that they may learn what the teacher did not intend to teach, teachers should check on the learning process rather frequently.

3.2.3.3 How to assess language ability?

According to Cohen (1994), for assessment methods that have been around a long time, people may have reached a spoken or unspoken agreement that these methods look like the right way to assess whatever it is that needs to be assessed. Indeed, teachers may choose methods that reflect the way they were assessed as students. It is always easier to continue to use a known quantity than to switch to a new approach.

3.2.3.3.1 Segregated-skill approach

There exist several approaches in language teaching, but this research is focused on the change that students, of the 2004 generation, faced in the University of Quintana Roo. In addition to teacher, learner, setting, and relevant languages, other important factors exist in the learning. In a practical sense, one of the most crucial of these factors consists of the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. If this weaving together does not occur, the strand consists merely of discrete, segregated skills—parallel threads that do not touch, support, or interact with each other. This is sometimes known as the **segregated-skill approach,** Oxford (2001). Another title for this mode of instruction is the language-based approach, because the language itself is the focus of instruction. In this approach, the emphasis is not on learning for authentic communication.

3.2.3.3.2. Integrated-skill approach

The learning also includes associated or related skills such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. The skill leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication when the skills are interwoven during instruction. This is known as the **integrated-skill approach** Oxford (2001).

This approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the

richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication.

Moreover, this approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. This approach allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time. Integrating the language skills also promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms. Finally, the integrated-skill approach, whether found in content-based or task-based language instruction or some hybrid form, can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.

3.2.3.4 Benefits for learners

One of the primary reasons for conducting language assessment in the classroom is to promote meaningful involvement of students with material that is central to the teaching objectives of a given course. For this meaningful involvement to take place, the goals of the assessment tasks need to reflect the goals of the course, and these goals need to be made clear to the students. If students perceive a quiz or test as relevant to their needs in the course, they are probably going to be more motivated to deal with it.

Quizzes may motivate students to pay closer attention to the material on a particular day, if the teacher announces at the outset of the class session that there will be a quiz on that material. (Krypsin & Feldhusen,1974). Of course, if there are too many such quizzes, or if the quizzes seem to be mindless exercises in order to accumulate numerical grades, such an approach may go wrong. As with any technique, the teacher must use judgment and be sensitive to the students' needs and preferences.

Regular assessment of learning can provide learners with feedback about their language performance at various stages in the developmental process. While assessment is taking place, students are taking feedback on how well they perform on those tasks. Once the task has been scored and evaluated,

students learn how well they did on what assessed. Depending on the quality of the feedback and the attention the students give it, they may learn something about their areas of strengths and also about the areas in which they are weak, prompting further learning or review.

3.2.3.5 Benefits for teachers

Any form of assessment can also profit teachers. According to Cohen (1994:15) "The design and construction of a quiz or test acts as an incentive for a teacher to determine the goals of instruction with regard to:

✓ Subject matter: for example, basic communicative skills such as greetings and leave taking, requests, refusals, apologies, complaints, and other speech acts; communicative grammar; pronunciation.

✓ Skills: productive—speaking and writing; respective—listening and reading.

✓ Desired level of achievement: what the class as a whole and individual students are expected to attain."

According to Cohen (1994) this information may indicate:

"how well the students are learning or if they have mastered the material, how well the teacher has put across the material, and also how well the item was written. Such feedback to the teacher can suggest areas for instruction, for review, or for improving future assessment."

Naturally, this feedback is not automatically transferred to the teacher by virtue of the fact that a quiz or test is administered. Rather teachers get value form the results if they invest time in their analysis. It may even be profitable to analyze the results of each item.

It has been stated the benefits of assessment for both teachers and students, but it is important to know when to do that assessment.

3.2.3.6 When to assess?

It is claimed that teachers should assess frequently. Cohen (1994) claims that on one hand, having a quiz at the beginning of class is that it can serve as a review of what was covered in the last class. It also helps students settle in to the class session. On the other hand, an advantage of having the quiz at the end of class is that it helps to keep students' attention levels high.

In the case of the generation that this thesis was based on, students had 3 evaluations during the quarter. It was divided into two mid-term exams and a final exam. Quizzes were applied at any time during the whole quarter.

3.2.3.7 How are quizzes to be used?

A quiz is not very rigorous or it is only a short test, but the quiz has certain unique and advantageous features, as a result, may produce a more natural and accurate assessment of learners' language abilities than a test. Cohen (1994) claims that if the activity is presented in a low-keyed and even informal manner, even test-shy students should be able to cope reasonably well with a quiz. Apart from possible being informal, a quiz is usually brief and is therefore often easier to construct, score, administer, and evaluate than a test. Obviously the shortness of quizzes may serve as an incentive for teachers to look closely at how well the material was assessed.

In this specific context and due to the nature of this research (case study) it was important to know if the change in the way of assessing affected negatively to the students. Since this is viewed from the students' perspective, this is focused on what they thought.

This is the end of the theoretical framework where motivation and its approaches were defined and the main points regarding assessment were established. Following up, the method we used is to be explain.

4. Method

In the following chapter, information about the research design, subjects, setting, instruments and procedures will be explained.

4.1 Context

The English language program at *Universidad de Quintana Roo* (UQROO) located in Quintana Roo, Mexico. This university is a public school and accepts around 60 students each year to study this major, after passing the CENEVAL II and an introductory course.

4.2 Participants

Since this was a case study, the participants were the UQROO students that entered the English Language BA program in 2004 and who failed an English course at any level from I through VIII. Most of the students were from Chetumal and others from towns near the city such as Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Butrón, Bacalar, and Morelos, to mention some. The number of the participants was 15 students: 9 women and 6 men. Their ages ranged from 22 to 30 years.

4.3 Instruments

A questionnaire designed by the researchers with thirty seven questions was used to gather the general information and the reasons why the participants failed the English courses. The questionnaire was in Spanish because half of the participants did not know enough English.

This questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions (see appendix A). The first part of the questionnaire included personal questions and the second part included questions related to motivation and the change of the way of assessing taking into account the previous methodology. In order to obtain further detailed information from the subjects, a semi-structured interview was used.

4.4 Procedures

The questionnaires were validated by two specialists and afterwards piloted in an English class of 15 students; once we checked how the first draft worked, we made the corrections that were necessary and redesigned it. Second we administered it to the participants and finally we made the interviews.

Five subjects were interviewed. They were chosen because they did a greater contribution in the questionnaire and were interested in the topic. We interviewed them individually, with the use of a video recorder. All their answers were transcribed literally. Each interview lasted from forty to sixty minutes approximately. The interview was semi-structured. (see protocol in appendix B). This was revised by two experts. When needed, we inquired further into the question or answers the interviewee offered.

The quantitative analysis was made by grouping each question by topic regarding motivation and assessment as the two factors we ear analyzing. Charts with these questions were made in order to have a visual image of them and then explain the results of each of the question, their tendency and relate it with the theoretical framework. In the same way the qualitative part analyzed the questions by the two main groups: motivation and assessment. Each part scrutinizes each question and in some of them examples are presented.

5. Findings

In this part a detailed analysis of the questioner and interviews is presented. First the quantitative along with the charts is analyzed and next the qualitative part.

5.1 Quantitative analysis

In the following pages we present the results of the questionnaires administered to fifteen students. This quantitative analysis is divided in two sections: motivation and assessment. The first section will be focused on the cognitive approach, which includes charts about each of the three theories that we are considering in this approach. The second section, assessment is analyzed by sub topics such as: exams, quizzes, feedback, how to asses and why to assess language ability. Tables with percentages show the results.

5.1.1 Motivation

5.1.1.1 Cognitive Approach

The Cognitive Approach focal point is the mental processes, more specifically memory and problem solving, and the way people acquire their knowledge about their world and how they apply that knowledge to situations and decisions in order to carry out successful actions. This approach also states that developing a satisfactory performance of student's motivation depends on factors of interest, curiosity, necessity to obtain information or to solve a problem. Bandura (1986) claims that the degree of a students' motivation in any situation (social or academic) receives the influence of the class environment, the teacher's, classmates and parents' attitudes. He also emphasized the importance of factors like perceptions and feelings.

This study has a cognitive approach for which the previous factors are being considered in the questionnaire. An analysis of the three theories: attribution, achievement motivation and social cognitive, are also taken into account.

5.1.1.1.1 Attribution theory

Weiner (1979) developed the Attribution theory in order to explain the way students respond questions about the causes of their success or failure. In the same way, Henson (1999) explains that learners attribute their success or failure to four main causes, ability, task difficulty, effort and luck.

In the following chart three questions are analyzed regarding the attribution theory. These questions where measured using a Likert scale. And they clearly show the tendency of the participants in their answers.
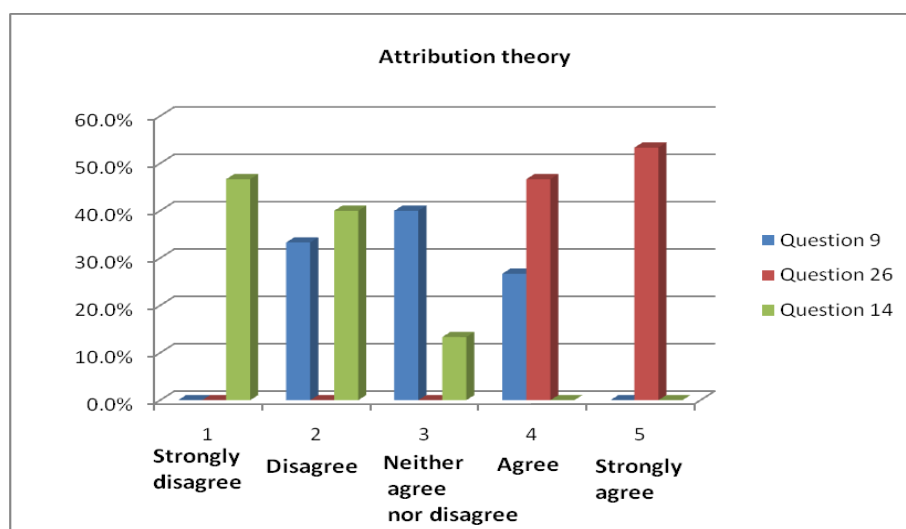
Chart 1: Attribution theory

Question number nine: *Era bueno para el inglés por lo que se facilitaba aprenderlo,* deals with the ability factor. As it is clearly noticeable there are three tendencies regarding question number nine. The first tendency, which stands out, shows that the participants neither agree nor disagree; this means that they were not aware of their ability. The second tendency shows that some participants disagreed; this means that they did not have the ability to learn English. And the third tendency shows that few of the participants agreed, in other words it was easy to learn English because they were good at it. Hence, this question shows a clear tendency to disagreement. Participants seem to attribute their failure to their lack of ability to learn English.

Subsequently, question number fourteen, *Nunca aprobaba los exámenes porque tenía mala suerte,* deals with the luck factor. The table shows a trend

toward disagreement. The participants strongly disagreed on the fact that they did not pass their exams because of a matter of luck. In other words luck was not seen as a factor of failure.

Question twenty-six, *Estaba consciente de que mi resultado de aprendizaje dependía de mi esfuerzo*, deals with the effort factor. For this question the tendency was for agreement. The participants totally agreed on being aware that their learning results only depended on their effort. Therefore, effort was seen as a factor of success.

In sum, the factors such as ability and effort, stated in the attribution theory, were seen as causes of failure of the students' performance from their perspective. On the other hand, luck was not perceived as a factor of failure during their English courses.

5.1.1.1.2 Achievement Motivation

As most of the theories we reviewed, the Achievement motivation theory takes into account what occurs inside the person, mind and thoghts, and not only what occurs outside of him. This theory, as Henson (1999) explains, defines motivation as the actions and feelings related to the fulfillment of any internalized standard excellence.

In the following chart three questions regarding the high or low achievement motivation students have were analized.
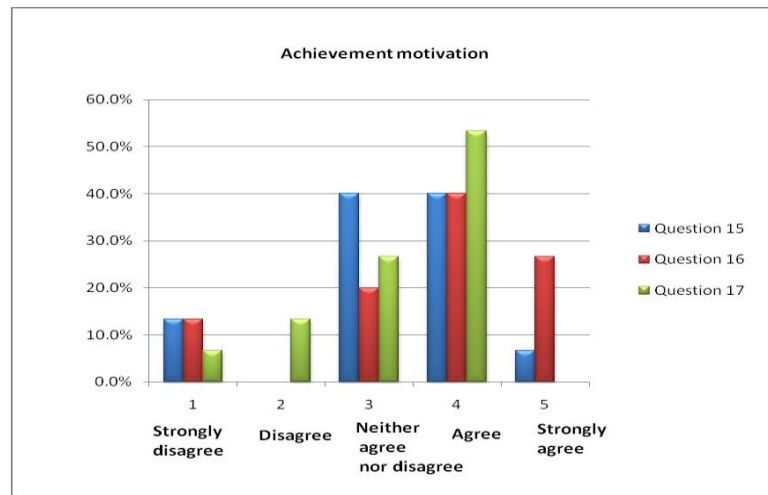
Chart 2: Achievement Motivation

In question number fifteen, *durante la clase participaba sin importarme si mis respuestas eran correctas o incorrectas,* a tendency to agreement was shown. Half of the majority of the participants, around the 40%, neither agreed nor disagreed, the other half, 40% also, agreed with the fact that they participate in class even if their answers were incorrect or correct. And one minority of the participants strongly agreed. This gives us more than an 80% of the participants agreeing with this question. On the other hand, only 13.3% of the participants totally disagreed with this question.

This means that the majority of the participants had a high achievement motivation, more specifically, by participating in class show that they have confidence in themselves, take calculated risks and carefully make plans, and by daring to participate even though the answer might be wrong means they were positive on accepting the consequences of their actions (deCharm,1976).

Additionally, question number sixteen, *me sentía desanimado cada vez que reprobaba un examen o una actividad me salía mal*, shows a tendency to agreement. The majority of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed on being de-motivated every time they failed an exam or an activity. Some of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed. And the minority totally disagreed. In other words, most of the participants by agreeing with this question showed a low achievement motivation, because failing in a task decreased their motivation for fear of making mistakes.

Lastly, question number seventeen*, para los ensayos o trabajos, prefería elegir temas sencillos*, most of the participants agreed on choosing an easy topic for any assessment or essay. Some of them neither agreed nor disagreed, and a few disagreed and totally disagreed on choosing easy topics. Point in fact, the majority showed a tendency of avoiding failure by choosing easy types of topics. This agrees with what Henson (1999) states about the three characteristics students have regarding failure: a necessity to avoid it, the probability to fail the task and the importance of the failure has on the student.

5.1.1.1.3 Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory, developed by Dweck (1986), concentrates on beliefs of intelligence that people have about them. It encloses four areas; the notion people have about their own intelligence, student's goals, confidence and behaviour patterns.

Chart 3: Social Cognitive Theory
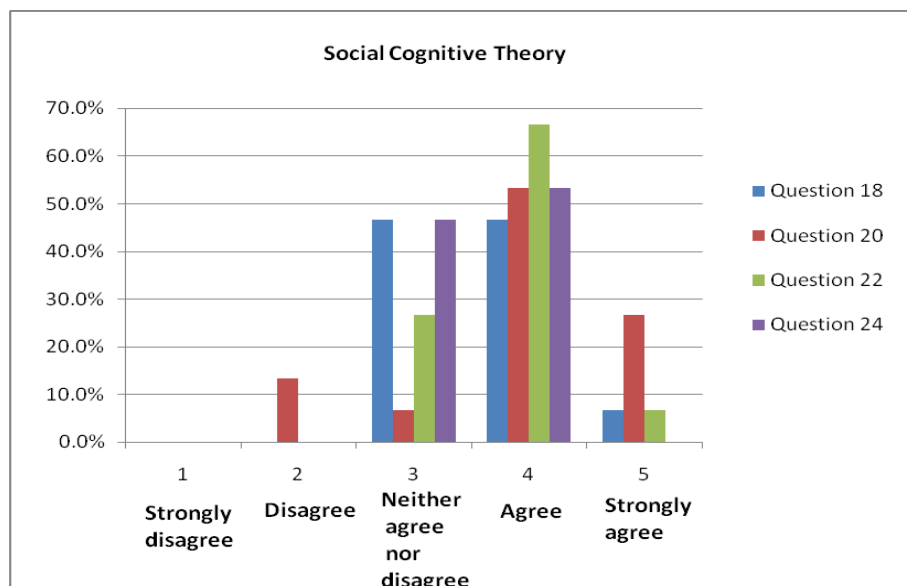
In question number eighteen, *el tener interés, curiosidad, necesidad de entender, te impulsó a tener un buen desempeño en clase*, behavior patterns were analyzed. There was a tendency to agreement. One half of the majority agreed and the other half neither agreed nor disagreed on having curiosity and that the necessity to understand made them have a good performance. And the

minority totally agreed. In other words, the majority of the participants showed an adaptive or control oriented behavior pattern because the necessity to understand motivated them to continue learning and also the persistence is one characteristic of this pattern.

After, in question twenty: *pienso que la inteligencia se puede moldear y adaptar, intelligence was analyzed*. The tendency was to agreement. Most of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with that the intelligence can be adapted and malleable. And the minority neither agreed nor disagreed. A few of the participants disagreed. This means that most of the participants believed that their intelligence is malleable and therefore can change and this is known as the dynamic notion about intelligence according to this theory.

In question number twenty-two, *en cada actividad que realizaba me esforzaba por comprender y dominar bien el tema que estaba aprendiendo*, the learning goals were analized. Evidently, the majority of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that they made an effort in all the activities in order to understand and dominate the new topic. Some of them neither agreed nor disagree and the last 6.7% totally agreed. Therefore, most of the participants clearly show to have learning goals because they pretended to increase comprehension, performance or to try to dominate a new skill (Henson 1999).

Finally, in question number twenty-four *cada vez que entregaba un trabajo o participaba en clase obtenía comentarios positivos de parte del maestro y mis compañeros,* the performance goals are analyzed. There was a tendency of agreement. Most of the participants agreed to have positive comments of the teacher and their classmates when performing a task. And the majority neither agreed nor disagreed. This means that the majority showed a performance goal by agreeing with the question because these types of goals are characterized by the desire of the student to have positive opinions and evaluation about their performance.

5.1.2 Assessment

Assessment is the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. Assessment can focus on the individual learner, the learning community, the institution, or the educational system as a whole (Cohen 1994).

5.1.2.1 Exams

Let us see below a chart showing the results of three questions related to exams.
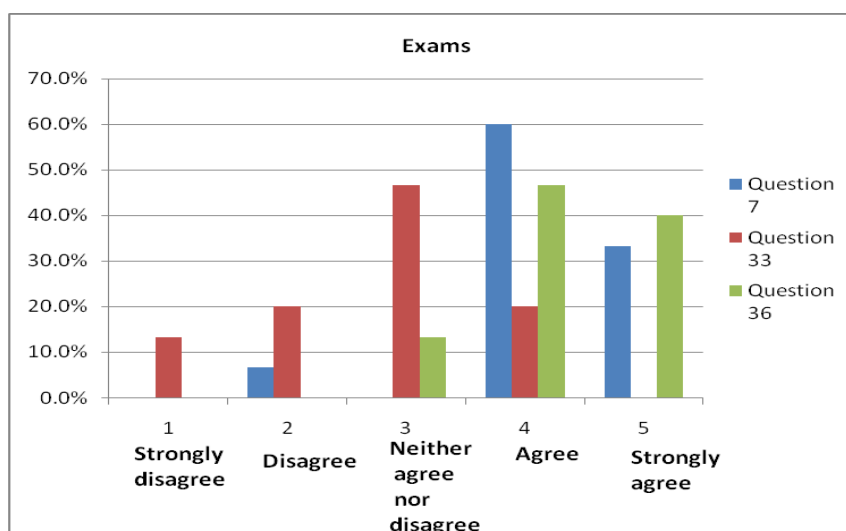
Chart 4: Exams

Question seven, *los exámenes me daban la oportunidad de demostrar los conocimientos que tenía sobre el idioma*, asked if the participants had the opportunity to show their knowledge about the English language during their exams. There was a tendency to agreement. Most of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with this fact. And just a few of them disagreed. This shows that exams are always a mode to demonstrate what you know or what you do not know.

In question thirty-three, *cuando presentaba un examen sabía que no me iría bien*. The chart shows a disagree tendency. On the one hand, some of the participants disagreed, strongly disagreed and the majority neither agreed nor disagreed. On the other hand, a few of the participants agreed. The results

confirmed that they were not aware about of this, or they paid a little attention or maybe their training was not too good.

In question thirty six, *normalmente me evaluaban con dos exámenes parciales y un final*, asked if they normally were assessed with two mid-terms exams and a final exam. The chart exemplifies a tendency to agreement. Most of the participants agreed, strongly agreed and just a few neither agreed nor disagreed. This demonstrates that the participants were always evaluated during their semesters in the English courses by the use of exams.

5.1.2.2 Quizzes

Certainly quizzes may motivate students to pay closer attention to the material on a particular day; of course, if there are too many such quizzes, such an approach may go wrong. (Krypsin & Feldhusen,1974).

In this chart, the students were asked regarding quizzes.

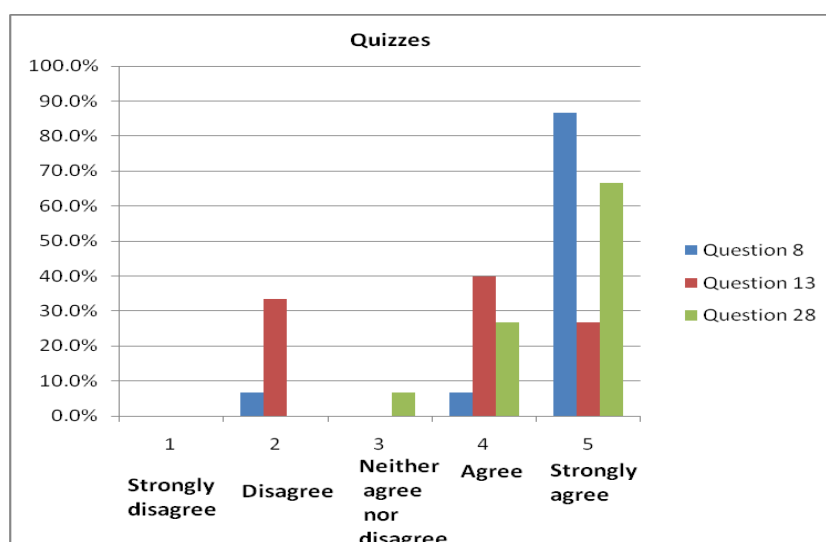**Chart 5: Quizzes**

In question eight, *aparte de los exámenes el maestro nos aplicaba quizzes*, asked that if besides the exams the teacher applied quizzes. The chart shows a tendency to agreement. The majority of the participants agreed and strongly agreed, and just a minority disagreed. This means that besides the exams, and as Krypsin & Feldhusen (1974) stated, quizzes were used and since they are

more informal than an exam, produced a more natural and accurate performance of learner's language abilities.

The question thirteen, *los quizzes se aplicaban de forma espontánea y sin previo aviso,* asked if the quizzes were applied spontaneously and without any warning. There was a trend toward agreement. The majority agreed and strongly agreed, but some did not agree. As it is known, quizzes are quick short evaluations and with a prior notice may be a motivator. In this case, the quizzes were spontaneously given; therefore the incentive did not exist.

Furthermore in question twenty eight, *cuando tenías un buen desempeño en los quizzes te sentías más alentado a seguir estudiando*, asked when students had a good performance in their quizzes they were motivated to keep studying. There was an agreeing tendency. This means that every time students have a good grade they will be motivated to keep studying.

5.1.2.3 What to asses?

Assessment can provide an opportunity for learners to learn about what they know and do not know, but only if the feedback from assessment is understandable to them (Cohen 1994). In the following chart results regarding feedback are shown.
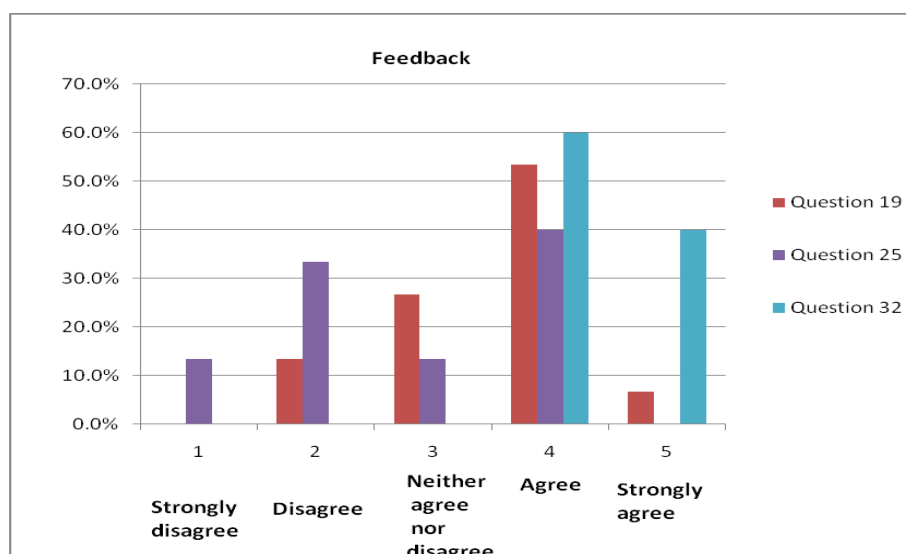

Chart 6: Feedback

In question nineteen, *después de presentar un examen el maestro siempre me daba una retroalimentación,* asked them if they had feedback after their exams. More than a half agreed and strongly agreed. Some of them neither agreed nor disagreed and a few disagreed. Hence, having this feedback gave the participants the opportunity to realize what they knew and did not know. But it is important to point out that not all the participants had a feedback.

In question twenty five, *durante la retroalimentación el maestro hablaba en inglés por lo que se me complicaba entenderlo*, half of the participants disagreed and strongly disagreed, less than a half agreed and a few neither agreed nor disagreed. This shows a slight tendency to disagreement. In other words, even though some students did not have any problem with feedback in English, others did. In addition, Schachter (1983) declared that learners do not necessarily learn what is taught and that they may learn what the teacher did not intend to teach, teachers should check on the learning process rather frequently.

In question thirty two, *la retroalimentacion me ayudaban a darme cuenta de mis areas de oportunidades*, asked if the feedbacks helped them to realize about their weak areas. All of the participants agreed and strongly agreed. This clearly demonstrates that feedback is an important tool for students to see in which English topic they are good or weak at.

In the following chart, two questions related to the hypothesis students create regarding feedback are presented.
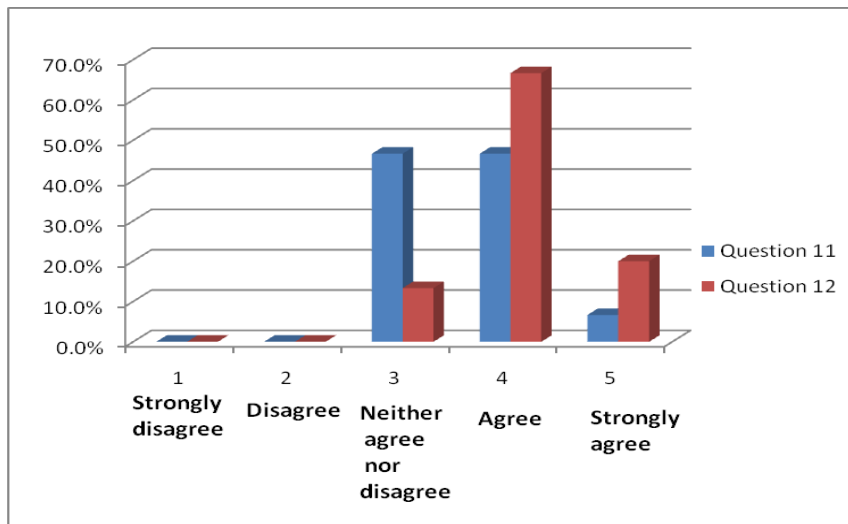
Chart 7: Hypothesis

In question eleven, *normalmente creaba hipótesis sobre cómo es que el idioma inglés funcionaba,* asked if the participants created hypothesis of how English worked. There was a tendency to agreement. More than a half agreed and strongly agreed. And some neither agreed nor disagreed. This shows that the participants created hypothesis about how English worked but some did not pay attention to this. It is important to create hypothesis regarding to language, because this makes its learning easier. This does not mean that if students do not make hypothesis they will not learn, but doing this, they could learn easier.

Therefore question number twelve, *la retroalimentacion me ayudaba a corregir o confirmar mis hipótesis*, asked if the feedback helped them to correct or confirm their hypothesis. It was found a tendency toward agreement. Most of the participants agreed and strongly agreed. A minority neither agreed nor disagreed. This shows that when students have a feedback of their exam or homework, undoubtedly they will confirm what they are learning. As Schachter (1983) claimed, learners depend on negative input to verify hypotheses about whether their utterances are comprehensible, grammatically correct, or situationally appropriate. Therefore, teachers, exams, homework and feedback play an important role in the learning process.

As a conclusion feedback is essential in the learning process. As Cohen (1994) claimed, sometimes students learn incorrectly because they pay inadequate

attention or because they do not have the proper basis for comprehending the material. Therefore, teachers have to pay more attention when providing feedback. It was found that feedback given in English may be a cause of misunderstanding for students who are studying English for the first time. It is worth mentioning that feedback also helped the learner to confirm or reformulate their hypothesis about how the language works, and to realize in which skills they had to pay more attention. Finally, it is important to create hypothesis to make the learning easier.

5.1.2.4 How to asses?

In this section of the questionnaire we asked the participants how they were evaluated regarding the segregated and integrated assessment.
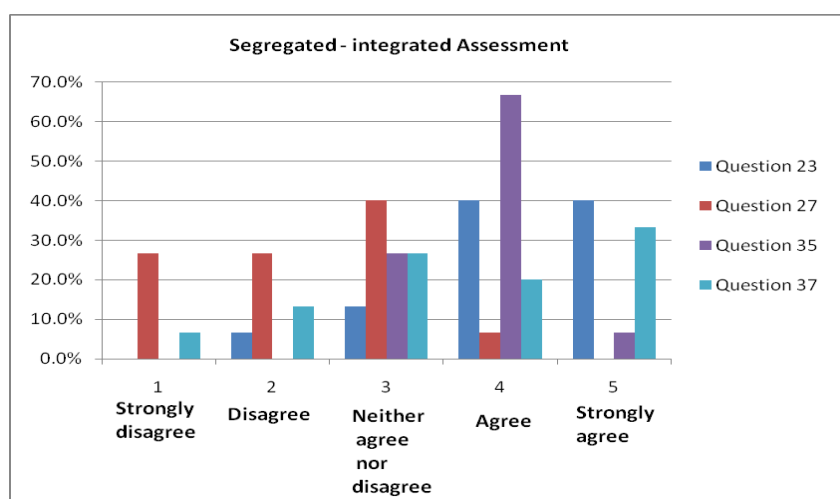
Chart 8: Segregated – Integrated Assessment

In question twenty-three*, sabía que tenía más oportunidad de pasar la materia cuando la calificación era promediada globalmente*, asked if they knew they had more opportunities to pass the subject when it was evaluated in a global way. There was a tendency to agreement. All of them agreed and strongly agreed. Therefore the students perceive the change of assessing as a cause of failure.

On the other hand, in question twenty seven*, en cada examen la evaluación de mis habilidades era injusta*, asked if the way of assessing their abilities was unfair. There was a tendency to disagreement. Half of the participants disagreed and strongly disagreed. Less than a half neither agreed nor

disagreed. And a few agreed. This shows that the participants thought that they had a fair evaluation.

Furthermore, they were aware that their progress had to be evaluated. Students were aware that they must be assessed regularly. In addition, the majority agreed with the question thirty five: *Al final del curso la forma de calificar concordó con lo explicado al principio*, asked at the end of the course, the way of assessing agreed with the established at the beginning.

In question thirty-seven, *cuando la calificación se promediaba por habilidades, me resultaba más difícil alcanzar la calificación aprobatoria,* asked when the grade was averaged in a segregated way, it was harder to reach a passing grade. There was a tendency to agreement. More than a half agreed and strongly agreed. Some neither agreed nor disagreed and a few disagreed.

5.1.2.5 Why assess language ability?
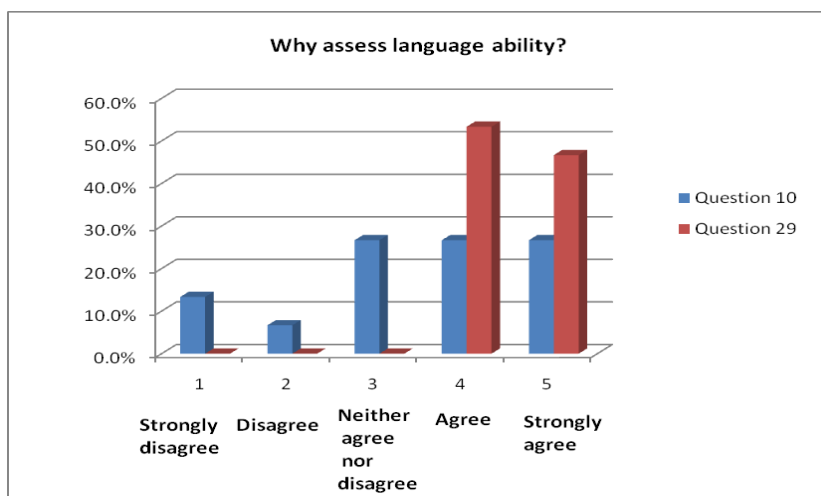
Chart 9: Why assess Language Ability?

In question ten, *el hecho de no tener otro lugar a parte de la Universidad donde practicar inglés era una desventaja*, there was a tendency to agreement. Half of the participants agreed and strongly agreed, some neither agreed nor disagreed, and a few disagreed and strongly disagreed. Cohen (1994) makes a distinction between to assess a second-language and to assess a foreign-language. In the former, the language being assessed is one that is spoken in the community in which it is being learned. In the second, the fact that the

language being assessed is not spoken in the local community may create problems for assessment. In this question we are not seeing it as a factor of failing, but as a disadvantage.

In question twenty-nine, e*staba consciente de que mis avances tenían que ser evaluados*, unquestionably, there was a tendency to agreement. All of the participants agreed and strongly agreed. In other words, participants were conscious that in a language learning classroom the progress can, and must be evaluated in a systematic way.

5.2 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis of the interviews is presented next. First, we have summarized in a chart the characteristics and profile of each participant, and also a global analysis of the interview is showed.

Participants	Age	Gender	Self reported cause of failure
Subject 1	25	Female	"Más que nada era porque como lo calificaban por habilidades, ó sea, pon tú que yo tenía 8, no sé 7, en las demás habilidades, pero por una habilidad reprobabas inglés, y por eso yo recuerdo que reprobé."
Subject 2	25	Female	"Fue por la deficiencia en Listening, y como se califica por habilidades, pues ahí salí baja y aparte de un poquito Reading, porque cuando las lecturas son muy largas me empiezo a desesperar y si estoy bajo presión no me puedo concentrar."
Subject 3	23	Female	"Pues nunca venía a la escuela, faltaba mucho a las clases. No hacía las tareas y eso hizo que repruebe. Fue creo que mi etapa de rebeldía; la escuela no me importaba."
Subject 4	30	Female	"En inglés 3, en general fue porque me distraje de mis clases, por los amigos y también las faltas; faltaba mucho a las clases y cosas así. Porque en realidad no era difícil, fue más que nada las distracciones y las faltas a la clase."

Subject 5	23	Male	"Porque en ese entonces me faltaba mucho vocabulario, y pues si yo no sé vocabulario pues voy a tener problemas en speaking, writing, pero principalmente tuve problemas en listening."

The information summarized in the previous chart shows what the students thought caused them to fail the English course, clearly then we can see that three out of the five students attribute their failure to an assessment matter, more in depth, grading by abilities made them have less chances to pass the subjects because each of these three participants had a weak ability that made them fail. On the other hand, two participants related their failure to a lack of interest in school and the major, these can be interpreted by stating that motivation was missing.

Following this further a qualitative analysis of the whole interview is presented which is divided into two main topics; motivation and assessment.

5.2.1 Motivation

The first question was asked to classify the type of motivation each participant was more likely to have. The results were that two out of the five showed a low motivation when entering the university. These two participants were in first place, pushed by their family to study the major and they did not have another major option.

Three out of the five showed an extrinsic motivation: an economical benefit from studying English was stated and the chance of having better opportunities when finishing not only in their working field but also in other fields related to English.

Two out of the five showed an intrinsic motivation: interest in learning English because of an enjoyment and pleasure for teaching English was also stated.

Three out of the five showed an Integrative motivation as they were interested in the English culture and the language itself. Moreover, when entering the university participants did not have a clear goal to follow. Most of them were interested in obtaining a degree for better opportunities in life, or in reaching a better social status. Participant 2, for example, declares that:

> "Conocer gente, relacionarme… si eres sociable y conoces gente… vienen las oportunidades laborales y de todo ... También ser alguien, tener la licenciatura es tener peso en la sociedad, eso pienso."

Participant 4, states that :

> "Pues eso, tener una carrera nada más."

However, there were other participants who did not know what they really wanted at that time. For instance participant 1 said:

> "Pues bueno, era… estudiar la carrera no, echarle las ganas, pero… o sea, casi, casi entré desanimada…estudié por estudiar y ya."

Or participant 3 who declared:

> "En realidad no tenía una en concreto. Sólo presenté el examen, pasé y pues me quedé."

Additionally, half of the participants when asked where they would like to work answered they wanted to work as a teachers and the other half stated they would like to work in the tourism field.

Most of the participants did not have a job by the time they failed the English course. They believed they failed because they did not make enough effort into the subject by the lack of interest rather than being the result of job or time

schedule conflicts. The minority of them did take time to study extra hours for the English subject.

Confidence takes an important role in motivation. When participants were asked if the students had confidence regardless their skills like speaking, reading, writing or listening, participants showed the same negative response, they did not have confidence in their abilities. Less than a half of the participants answered they had confidence in two of the four abilities, like participant 4 who stated:

> "Algunas, no todas. Por ejemplo Reading, listening sí… Para mí siempre tuve más seguridad en Reading."

This may suggest that students were not prepared to a change in the way of assessing, from an integrated to a segregated one, and they might needed a better preparation. Also this agrees with the Attribution Theory which states that the learner attributes his success or failure to four main factors, in this case the ability is one of them and according to this theory, the ability can be an internal and stable factor but the student does not exercise much direct control.

Beside the Attribution Theory, they also showed a low confidence with respect to their abilities which is related with the Social Cognitive Theory which is about having beliefs of their own intelligence. This is clearly stated by participant 2:

> "No, de hecho llegaba el momento en el que me sentía muy apenada porque veía que otros sabían más y yo estaba muy debajo de su nivel."

And participant 5 also declared:

> "Pues no, no me sentía muy cómodo. En los primeros semestres sentía que era el único que tenía problemas en esas habilidades: pensaba que los demás iban bien, sentía como que yo era el único que tenía problemas."

In addition, all the students demonstrated having a low Achievement Motivation because, as the theory states, there is a tendency to avoid failure, and by not being confidence in their abilities, they avoided situations where failing was present.

Regarding peer motivation, they were asked if there was any peer help among students and the minority mentioned that they did not help their classmates due to the critics they would receive. This clearly shows the performance goal students can have by avoiding negative evaluation about their performance during class activities.

On the other hand, one of the participants showed the learning goal (in which they intend to increase comprehension, performance or try to master a new skill), by expressing that even though he was not proficient in an ability he attempted to increase his performance by practicing extra class activities.

Being motivated can be expressed by the participation of students during classes. Furthermore, volunteering participation took place since the majority participated when they could. This means that they presented a relative achievement motivation because they were able to take calculated risks and decide whether to participate or not.

On the contrary, a constant factor that influenced negatively the participation of the subjects, in this case, was the class environment and classmates' criticism. This is clearly stated in the answers of the participants. Participant 1 affirmed:

> "Sí me daba pena porque… los compañeros cuando tú no dices algo, se ríen y la verdad como que eso sí… da penita que se burlen de uno. Entonces, así como que mejor te reservas, y es que a veces sí lo sabes y lo dice otra persona y dices "ah, sí era eso".

When asked what they did if something was difficult to learn or understand, the majority of the participants showed adaptive or control oriented behavior

patterns which means that people's behavior can be characterized by actions that seek challenge and persistence when any obstacle is faced. In other words, when any difficulty appeared they persisted in seeking for a better understanding of the topic and asked for help to friends or teachers. Participant 1 in this regard said that:

> "Pues casi siempre recurría a alguien, a una muchachita. Cuando se me hacía complicado siempre ella me apoyaba, o siempre buscaba ayuda de alguien que sepa o de la maestra."

Participant 2 stated:

> "Recurría a la ayuda del maestro... Y se lo agradezco mucho, porque a pesar de que reprobé con él, me dio mucho de su tiempo y me ayudó..."

Participant 4 also declared:

> "Preguntaba a alguien, a un compañero antes que al maestro. Pero tampoco era a cualquier compañero, siempre buscaba al que sabía más. Y ya de plano, si era algo muy complicado pues ya me acercaba al maestro."

Participant 5 affirmed that:

> "Si el maestro nos explica algo, y no lo entendiendo, pues anoto en mi libreta que cual es la duda y luego lo checo ya sea en Internet o le pregunto al maestro o voy al SAC."

These four participants also showed an internal locus of control because even though the task difficulty is beyond them, they made an effort by trying to understand the topic. This showed that they were aware that for a successful performance they needed to study.

On the other hand, one of the five participants showed a maladjusted behavior pattern by avoiding difficulty in the topic or tasks and showing a low interest in clearing doubts by stating that:

> "Lo dejaba. No, de hecho, en ese semestre era más así de que si no lo sabía, y me daba pena preguntar, no preguntaba. Nisiquiera revisaba, no preguntaba."

Less than half of the participants, when being asked how they reacted if they were asked something by the teacher and did not know the answer, showed a maladjusted or helpless behavior pattern. Here the participants expressed negative feelings like anxiety when the teacher called on them. Participant 1 stated:

> "Me daba nervios, y pena de que "Chin otros lo saben y yo no"."

And participant 3 declared:

> "Quedaba roja. Pues decía "no sé"."

Two of the five showed a control oriented or adaptive behavior pattern, by stating that even though they did not know the correct answer, they tried to answer it. Participant 4 declared that:

> "…hacía el intento y medio trataba de responder o adivinar, pero pues cuando te corriges y respondes mal, pues ya, al menos lo intenté."

Participant 5 said that:

> "pues daba una respuesta aproximada, pero nunca me quedaba callado. Independientemente de si estabe bien o mal contestaba."

More clearly, these two participants showed persistence by facing and trying to answer a question that they were not sure about and did not know the answer. In other words they did not give up and participated even though they were not sure about their utterance (pronunciation or speech).

More than a half of the participants answered positively about their own effort in the course. They believed it was enough and showed they were aware of the effort they were making.

On the other hand, two of the three participants, besides being aware of the effort, showed an external locus of control. This refers to the fact that students believe their performance is all about luck, the difficulty of tasks or other circumstances are out of their control. Therefore the reason of their failure was not understood by them. One of these participants showed an internal locus of control by stating that the effort and the dedication gave knowledge as a result and the lack of fear of the abilities. Two out of the five participants were not conscious about their success or failure on the subject therefore the effort to succeed in the subject was not made.

The majority of the participants stated a negative response about believing in luck, as a factor affecting their failure, better say to be a lucky person. Participant 1 affirmed that:

> "eso no tiene nada que ver, eso no es nada de suerte, eso es algo de uno mismo de echarle las ganas".

Participant 2 claimed that:

> "No, porque si no, sí hubiera pasado. Bueno la suerte no existe, …bueno, sólo en ciertas situaciones. Pero si solo te la vives de la suerte, la suerte no te va a llevar a algo seguro"

One of the participants gave a positive answer by saying to have passed an exam by luck. Participant 5 stated that:

> "pues, sí porque, hay veces que pienso no sé qué hago aquí. Sí a veces siento que todavía tengo problemas o a veces pienso que paso los exámenes por chiripazo".

Furthermore, the majority of the participants did not believe luck was a factor that influenced in a positive or a negative way their performance during their process of learning at school. This can be clearly seen in the answer the participants showed. Participant 5 stated that:

> "no, no creo que haya pasado por suerte, lo que pones en tu examen es lo que tú sabes… Si te sacaste un ocho es porque te lo mereces. No creo que haya suerte en ese tipo de cosas."

Participants were aware of the fact that if they made a good effort they would obtain good results, rather than believing luck was a factor that influenced them in their learning, performance or grades.

It was interesting to see that failing was seen as a factor that could be both motivating and de-motivating. The majority of participants had a positive answer in this question: more than a half demonstrated to have an internal locus of control (this refers to the responsibility that students have of their behavior and their own success or failure) by expressing that as a consequence of failing they were able to analyze what they were doing wrong and this shows a great understanding of their responsibility in their failure. Participant 2 said that:

> "Sí, me ha animado. Por que si repruebas es porque no lo sabías y ahí es donde se necesita duplicar el esfuerzo. Y qué bueno que exista la reprobación para que la gente vea donde tiene sus debilidades."

Participant 3 declared that:

> "Pues sí porque después de haber reprobado te pones a pensar en lo que estabas haciendo y ya te das cuenta que no estabas haciendo bien las cosas, recapacitar y regresar al camino."

Participant 5 stated that:

> "…empecé a reflexionar, y dije sí se puede a lo mejor es algo que no estoy haciendo bien entonces lo que yo hice fue darme otra oportunidad de seguir, y ahorita no me arrepiento porque ya estoy mejorando mucho."

On the other hand Participant 1 declared:

> "Sí, o sea el haber reprobado te desanima por que tú dices, ah por más esfuerzo que le ponga… no salgo adelante ¿no? Y sí te desanima."

This showed an external locus of control by stating that even though she made a lot of effort in the subject, she could not avoid failing.

When asked if they felt attracted by the culture in some way, more than a half of the participants showed a positive answer to this question by stating the interest in knowing the English speaking culture, costumes, the life style and how they think.

The other two participants did not show interest in the culture. One of them explained that throughout the years her interest increased. While the other stated she was more interested in the language rather than in the culture.

Intelligence is believed to be important to some students, either for studying a major or for life. When asked what intelligence is, the majority of the participants

believed intelligence is the ability people have to do things, to think, to take advantage of opportunities and also to develop them.

Participant 2 stated:

> "Es la habilidad para hacer ciertas cosas de manera fácil. Si yo uso mi inteligencia, puedo hacer las cosas más simples, enlazar ciertas cosas…más fácil y en menos tiempo, más sencillo."

Participant 3 declared:

> "La habilidad que tenemos todos para pensar."

Participant 4 said:

> "Es la habilidad para poder tomar ventaja de tus habilidades o saber desarrollarlas para los propósitos que tú tengas o los que quieras alcanzar."

This clearly shows a dynamic notion of the intelligence which affirms that intelligence is malleable and can change. The majority of the participants thought that intelligence is important in order to study a major. Participant 2 said:

> "Un papel muy importante porque estudiar una carrera te va a exigir mucha inteligencia para que puedas cumplir en todo."

On the other hand, participant 3 declared:

> "No muy importante pero sí es algo que necesitas, pues igual y lo puedes desarrollar ya estando en la carrera."

Consequently, participants have a dynamic notion of intelligence. Nevertheless, half of the participant stated that intelligence did not influence at least in a negative way for them their failing the English course. Participant 1 affirmed:

> "No, pues más que nada para mí fue el ambiente, y que la carrera no era lo que yo quería estudiar. Siempre fue algo de obligación para mí, nada me motivaba a seguir estudiando."

The other half declared that it did influence them by not taking any advantage of the opportunities they had or by not developing abilities that would help them in the course.

Participant 3 said:

> "Sí un poco, porque no adquirí el conocimiento suficiente porque no quise hacerlo. Tuve la capacidad pero no lo hice."

Moreover, we asked them if the criteria that the teacher set at the beginning of the course to grade them, were the same at the end. The five participants agreed with this question. They all agreed that the teacher took into account the same criteria that he or she mentioned at the beginning.

5.2.2 Assessment

To begin with, it is imperative to point out the issues related with assessment that affected the participants' performance in the English course. The five participants answered something different.

The first student failed English II. She was in her second semester of the major. She claimed that she was affected by her classroom's environment. She was ashamed when speaking because the majority of her classmates had a high performance and she did not. Several students mocked at her:

> "Pues para mí, fue que los demás supieran y yo no, porque venía de cero y mis compañeros la mayoría venía de Academias o cosas así. Y en vez de que tus compañeros te ayudaran, te perjudicaban. Algunos se burlaban y pues por eso me daba pena hablar y cosas así. Fue más bien

el ambiente. Tal vez si hubiera tenido otro tipo de compañeros, o sea, a mi nivel, pues las cosas hubieran sido diferentes. Porque, por ejemplo, en mis clases del SAC, todos estábamos al mismo nivel y pues ahí sí me sentía a gusto preguntando y participando."

It is interesting how classmates can affect negatively some students. This participant felt ashamed and this made her not have the desire to make a contribution during the class.

The second student failed English VI when she was in her seventh semester. She realized that she did not study the time she should, also she emphasizes that the change of assessment affected her negatively:

"Lo que afectó mi desempeño fue el no estudiar el tiempo suficiente, tenía deficiencia en la habilidad de *listening* y como se calificaba por habilidades pues no pasé."

This participant also pointed out that because of the listening she could not pass the course.

The third participant also failed English II, in her third semester. She accepted that she did not have any interest in the class:

"Desinterés. Las amistades influyen mucho, pero tampoco te obligan a hacer las cosas. Pero creo que sí me afectó en esa forma."

This student did not have any motivation, she let her friends influence her negatively.

The fourth participant failed English III and English VI. She said:

"La falta de tiempo, dedicarle más tiempo… la falta de interés, le dedicaba el tiempo indispensable que necesitaba para cumplir."

This participant was also aware that she did not dedicate enough time to the course; she did not have any interest in it either.

The fifth participant failed English V in his sixth semester. He believed that what affected his performance was the lack of concentration and his disorganization, the change of assessment, and points out that he had serious problems with *Listening:*

> "Como había dicho, pues la falta de concentración, me distraía muy rápido, a veces si no dormía muy bien, entonces me sentía cansado o el estrés o a veces cuando miro algo afuera me distraigo. También la falta de vocabulario y, por lo tanto, problemas en *Listening*. A veces no organizo bien mi tiempo, entonces no me da tiempo de terminar ciertas actividades."

It is known that if students pay attention to their class, do their homework and study by themselves, certainly they will not have troubles in their exams. We asked our participants how they prepared themselves before their exams. Nobody denied that they did not study the time they should. The five of them were aware that if they had studied before their exams, maybe they would have passed them.

Furthermore, we asked them what their reaction was regarding the grade that they have had, and we found that three out of five were surprised because they did not expect such a failing grade. On the contrary, the other two participants were aware that they did not have a good performance in their exams so they found this like a feedback:

> "Mi reacción era buena, porque me daba cuenta en cual habilidad estaba mal, y pues ya veía en cual me estaba encarrilando." Said participant 1.

On the other hand, participant 2 said:

"Mal, ponle que si era 7 pues no muy mal."

Participant 3 claimed:

"Me sorpendí, sí me lo esperaba pero no me había caído el veinte".

The fourth participant said:

"Pues sí me sorprendía mucho, esperaba más, como ¿por qué? Porque de repente me sorprendía que saliera baja en *Reading* o *Listening* y en el *use of English* sí me sorprendí que cuando lo hacía por lógica sí le atinaba."

Finally, the fifth participant also points out her deficiency regarding Listening, she criticizes the way of teaching and assessing *Listening*, she claimed:

"Pues yo sabía que en ciertas habilidades iba a salir bien, pero en otras no tanto, sabía cómo iban a ser mis calificaciones, sabía que *Writing* no iba a tener problemas ni en *Use of English*, porque antes del examen le doy una revisión a mis apuntes, pero lo que no tenía mucho control es en cuanto al *Listening* porque en un examen sólo te lo ponen dos veces y a lo mejor yo necesito más concentrarme y me distraigo muy rápido."

Moreover, we asked them for the grade obtained and if they deserved it. Three out of five participants did not agree with the grade they had, because they only failed one ability and this made that they failed the whole course this was due to the change of assessing that students faced. On the other hand, the other two participants think that they deserved it because they did not put all the effort they should.

It is important to mention that the way of assessing the English courses changed in English III, specifically in spring 2006. In the first two courses: English I and II the way of assessing was global, this means that if the student failed any language skill (listening, reading, speaking, writing), he or she could

pass if he or she reached the 70 per cent, taking into account the four skills and one subskill. However in the following course, in English IV, this method changed. The students had to pass the four skills in order to pass the course. If they failed one, they had to take the course again and this caused that several students stayed behind or dropped out.

According to this fact, we asked the participants if they were affected by this change. We found that four out of five were clearly affected. The four participants agreed with the fact that this change should have been done since the first English course, because they would have been aware and consequently pay more attention to the ability in which they had deficiencies. The other participant said that she was not affected by this change because she had already taken English courses where she was evaluated in a segregated way.

Nobody denies that this change was favorable, because they could realize that they must be prepared in the four skills in order to have a better performance.in their careers. The five participants agreed that this change was made to push student´s to have a better performance; however this change affected them because they were left behind.

Participant 1 said:

> "La verdad es que sí fue por nuestro bien, para que uno le echara más ganas, para que se enfoque más en lo que le hiciera falta."

Participant 2 claimed:

> "Es bueno porque pienso que debemos tener el dominio de todas las habilidades y sub-habilidades. Es una lástima que no nos hayan calificado así desde el principio porque algunos tienen deficiencias en pronunciación y así siguen enseñando con esas deficiencias. Yo pienso que sí es difícil el trance por el que pasamos y que estoy viviendo ahora, porque te obligan a ser

"perfecta" en todas las habilidades para que tú puedas transmitirlo, pero pues en general pienso que estuvo bien."

Participant 3 also agreed:

"Yo estoy totalmente de acuerdo con este cambio."

Participant 4 claimed:

"No le hecho la culpa al sistema, porque global o no global siento que sí es muy importante que estés apto en todas las habilidades. Entonces sí vale la pena que se califique así porque no se vale que por tener diez en las tres primeras pues pases, es duro pero es bueno, tienes que estar bien en las cuatro habilidades para estar bien."

And finally the fifth participant said:

"Pues está bien, porque no tiene caso que pases a otro nivel si no tienes los conocimientos que uno debería. Yo creo que ahí demuestras que uno esta reprobando o no. Ahí demuestras cuánto estas mejorando y si tú le dedicas empeño no vas a tener ningún problema con las habilidades. Por eso te repito, a mi no sé que me pasaba por que yo sí practicaba pero no sé porque me fue mal en *listening*."

The assessment of students' language abilities is something on which teachers spend a fair amount of class time in one way or another. In the best of all possible worlds, such assessment is valuable for both the teachers and the learners (Cohen, 1994).

In the same way it was important to know how the teacher evaluated the course that they took. Clearly all participants agreed that the criteria used by the teachers were not fair. They had to hand in portfolios, workbooks, vocabularies'

notebooks and also passed quizzes, and this was not taken into account, this was just required as homework. In the end, if they did not pass the exam, they failed.

Also the five agreed that in the class they worked in their books and sometimes the teacher handed in extra exercises. However, these exercises did not have a percentage in their global grade, this means that if they failed one skill in their exam, they automatically failed the course; obviously the five participants believe that this was unfair.

One of the primary reasons for conducting language assessment in the classroom is to promote meaningful involvement of students with material that is central to the teaching objectives of a given course. Furthermore, we asked them if the activities that they had to do were difficult to understand. Three out of five students answered that the activities were easy to do and to understand, however two participants though that the activities were difficult specially those of grammar and listening.

Consequently, three out of five claimed that they did not like this way of grading because it was too strict. They criticized the way of assessing also they said that they had to adapt to this way of assessing:

> "No me gustaba, era muy rígida, pero tienes que adaptarte a la forma de calificar de cada maestro. Y es que tocó la casualidad que llevaba en el SAC el mismo libro que el de la clase de inglés 6 y pues ahí veía el contraste de los maestros para calificar…" said participant 2.

On the other hand, two participants liked this way of assessing because they though this pushed them to work harder. However, the five agreed that this change of assessing pushed them to pay more attention to all the language skills and therefore this helped them to become a better student. Participant 1 said:

> "Sí nos ayudaba porque así estudiabas todas las habilidades. Pero cuando reprobé si me dio mucho coraje porque fue sólo por una habilidad, creo que fue *Speaking,* porque ya de hecho el *Listening* ya lo había perfeccionado."

Participant 2 claimed:

> "Sí. Estaba bien, porque yo también no quería a un maestro flojo."

Participant 3 said:

> "Sí. Pues hace que desarrolles más de una habilidad."

Participant 4 agreed:

> "Si me ayudaba"

And finally participant 5 concluded:

> "Bueno, al menos a mí me gusta, a pesar de que reprueban más alumnos, creo que es una manera en la que se equilibran todas las habilidades y que no sólo te centres en una, porque tal vez puedes escribir perfectamente pero no hables bien o viceversa."

Unquestionably, assessment provides an opportunity to know what you really know and do not. However, since language learners are continually formulating and reformulating hypotheses about the way language works, they can benefit from feedback about the degree to which the hunches, analogies, and generalizations that they have made are correct Schachter (1983).

Following this further, the five participants agreed that they had feedback to check what their mistakes were after their exams. However, they emphasized that teachers kept the exams. So they could only check them about two or three minutes and return them:

> Si veías tu examen, tus errores, lo anotabas y ya. Pero los teníamos que regresar. Entonces sí sentí que hacía falta que nos dejaran el examen para que tú después lo estudiaras, porque ¿Cuál era el punto? Tal vez no te acuerdas después del error y lo vuelves a cometer, said participant 4.

It is worth mentioning that during the interview the participants stated some aspects related to teachers' personality as a factor affecting their performance. Interestingly, teachers' personality did not affect negatively in the majority of the students' performance. Generally teachers were willing to help and to clear out doubts. In addition, when an incentive was given, the participants had an increase of their motivation. On the other hand, they felt uncomfortable when the teachers told them that they were doing something wrong.

In the same way, more than a half of them claimed not having any problem with the way teachers taught. It was also said that the teachers were organized and disciplined. They were concerned about the understanding of the lesson and in some cases extra material and group activities were used.

As we can see through this analysis, motivation was influential regarding failure. Factors such as ability and effort affected somehow the performance of students. Indeed they seemed to attribute failure to their lack of ability, and the effort they made was seen as factor of success. In other words, if someone made a great effort on achieving learning, the results would be positive but if there was no effort then they were to have negative results. On the other hand, the majority of the participants showed a high achievement motivation by being confident in themselves and accepting the consequences of their actions. But, failing a task decreased the motivation, thereby increasing the fear of making mistakes, so a way to prevent this was by choosing easy topics for doing essays and works in order to avoid failure.

Furthermore, participants also showed adaptive or control oriented behavior pattern showing a necessity to understand which kept them motivated to learn.

The leaning goal and the performance goal were also present in this research. The first one since participants intended to increase comprehension or tried to become proficient in a new skill, and the second one by having the desire to have positive opinions about their performance. Another important fact was that intelligence was seen as malleable and changeable.

Similarly to motivation, the other factor that was analyzed was assessment. It was found that the participants had three evaluations during the semesters and several quizzes. Quizzes, portfolios and homework were also used. As it is known, quizzes are quick short evaluations and with a prior notice may be a motivator. In this case, the quizzes were spontaneously given; therefore the incentive did not exist. It is important to mention that all these activities, quizzes and portfolios were not taken into account in the final grade. Obviously, this was considered unfair by the participants because their effort was only reflected in the exams.

After their exams, students received feedback. Hence, having this feedback gave the participants the opportunity to realize what they knew and did not know. It was found that when students have a feedback, undoubtedly they will confirm what they are learning. Feedback is essential in the learning process.
On the other hand, the participants mentioned that teachers did not let them to keep their exams. Sometimes the feedback was too quickly because teachers just let them to have a scanning of their exams. Another fact that it was found, was that feedback was given in English, and students who did not have a high performance found it too difficult to understand it.

Regarding the change of assessment that the participants faced, it was found that they knew they had more opportunity to pass the subject when it was evaluated in a global way. The participants thought that they had a fair evaluation. They were not prepared for this change. The majority showed a big deficiency towards *listening.* They also thought that the evaluation was not meaningful because they had to present portfolios, homework, etc and these were not taken into account. The evaluation was only based on exams they did not have other criteria.

6. Conclusions

Taking into account the qualitative and the quantitative analysis of this research some conclusions can be drawn. The objective was to investigate the reasons of failure among the 2004-2009 generation in the EFL program at University of Quintana Roo, considering motivation and assessment as the particular areas, more specifically to analyze in which way these two factors affected students' in the English courses and led them to failure.

Regarding motivation, the two main motives that students had when entered the university were: family influence and the economical benefit this major implies. Also they did not have a clear goal to follow and they were more interested in obtaining the degree in order to have better opportunities not only in teaching but in other fields. Besides that, intrinsic, extrinsic and integrative motivation were found among the participants.

During the analysis, considering the three cognitive theories, within the aspects of the Attribution Theory, the lack of ability and effort were factors that did affect negatively students' performance. On the contrary luck did not influence. Moreover, concerning Achievement Motivation Theory, students showed a relative achievement motivation. On one hand, they decided whether participated or not. On the other hand, there was a necessity of avoiding failure in any task, for example by choosing easy topics for them. Finally, with reagard to the Social Cognitive Theory, students demonstrated to have an adaptive or control oriented behavior pattern, by seeking the way of understanding topics for a better learning. They showed to have a dynamic notion about intelligence, which means that is malleable and therefore can change. They also showed a lack of confidence in their abilities and to have students' goals (learning and performance goals).

Certainly the results of this research showed that motivation was seen as a factor of failure. Some participants in the interview, declared not been interested in the English courses, which demonstrates that motivation is the key that leads

to success and if there is a lack of it, it is difficult to achieve any goal, no matter if the way of assessing is changed.

Besides that, assessment was also seen as a factor of failure. Due to the change on the way of grading, from an integrated to a segregated approach, students were affected because they were left behind and at the extreme some dropped out. Moreover, students perceived the change of assessing (to a segregated way of assessing) as cause of their failure. In addition, they realized that this change was beneficial for them because although it required more practice and study, they could focus on the ability at which they were weak.

Lastly, this research demonstrates how important motivation is in order to learn a foreign language due to the double effort students have to perform: to learn English and to learn how to teach English. Because of this it is important to determine the suitable profile students need to have when entering the major. Furthermore, assessment is an important area where the institution needs to pay close attention. As it is demonstrated in this research, the changes that were made negatively affected the students during the 2004-2009 generation. Nobody denied that this change was favorable, but if this change was made, there should have been the proper professional training courses for each of the skills. Also this change should have been executed since the first semester of the generation or for new generations, instead of applied it in the middle of the major.

Along the process of analysis it was interesting to find out that the main ability students struggle with was listening. Therefore, a suggestion would be to purse this further, to find out the reasons why the ability of listening is hard for students. Another recommendation would be, to make a study of how the segregated assessment is affecting new students' generation.

It is worth to mention that these two factors did affect students' performance since their perspective. The segregated assessment was a challenging factor that not all of the students could get over it. Some failed and still continue studying, but others dropped out. A lack of effort towards the English courses

was also found since some of the students were not as motivated as to keep it up with the rest of their classmates. Others, the lack of confidence in their abilities was something that really affected in their process of learning.

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Appendix

A) Questionnaire

- El objetivo de esta encuesta es recolectar datos que ayuden a corroborar la investigación que estamos elaborando.
-
- Responde sinceramente las siguientes preguntas con respecto a tu experiencia como estudiante de la carrera de Lengua Inglesa en la Universidad de Quintana Roo.

-
- 1. Nombre (opcional):_____
- 2. Edad: _____   3. Procedencia: _____
-
- 4. ¿Cuándo entraste a la Lic. De Lengua Inglesa, tenias algún conocimiento previo del idioma Inglés?
-         a) Si   b) No
-
- 5. Durante tu proceso de aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés, te sentías:
- a) Interesado, disfrutabas de la clase, actividades y con ganas de participar.
- b) Curioso por aprender pero no siempre estabas entusiasmado.
- c) Obligado y sin ganas de aprender, hacer actividades o participar.
- d) Otro_____
-
- 6. Estudiabas Inglés porque…
- a) Te brindaría mejores oportunidades de trabajo y socio-económica.
- b) Te sentías atraído por la cultura Americana.
- c) Al ver que aprendías, te interesaba más.
- d) Te gustaba y te sentías capaz de seguir aprendiendo.
- e) Otro_____
-
- Valora el grado de acuerdo con las siguientes afirmaciones, según la siguiente escala:

1	2	3	4	5
Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo

-

	1	2	3	4	5
7. El tener interés, curiosidad, necesidad de entender, te impulsó a tener un buen desempeño en clase:					
8. Era bueno para el inglés por lo que se facilitaba aprenderlo.					
9. Estaba consiente de que mi resultado de aprendizaje dependía de mi esfuerzo.					
10. Nunca aprobaba los exámenes porque tenía mala suerte					
11. Durante la clase participaba sin importarme si mis respuestas eran correctas o incorrectas.					
12. Para los ensayos o trabajos, prefería elegir temas sencillos.					
13. Me sentía desanimado cada vez que reprobaba un examen, o una actividad me salía mal.					
14. Pienso que la inteligencia se puede moldear y adaptar:					
15. Cada vez que entregaba un trabajo o participaba en clase obtenía comentarios positivos de parte del maestro y mis compañeros:					
16. En cada actividad que realizaba me esforzaba por comprender y dominar bien el tema que estaba aprendiendo					
17. Los exámenes me daban la oportunidad de demostrar los					

conocimientos que tenía sobre el idioma					
18. En cada examen la evaluación de mis habilidades era injusta.					
19. Cuando presentaba un examen sabía que no me iría bien.					
20. Estaba consiente de que mis avances tenían que ser evaluados.					
21. El hecho de no tener otro lugar a parte de la Universidad, donde practicar el idioma era una desventaja.					
22. Después de presentar un examen el maestro siempre me daba una retroalimentación.					
23. Las retroalimentaciones me ayudaban a darme cuenta de mis aéreas de oportunidades.					
24. Normalmente creaba hipótesis sobre cómo es que el idioma inglés funcionaba.					
25. Las retroalimentaciones me ayudaban a corregir o confirmar mis hipótesis					
26. Durante la retroalimentación el maestro hablaba en inglés, por lo que se me complicaba entenderlo.					
27. Normalmente me evaluaban con dos exámenes parciales y un final					
28. A parte de los exámenes, el maestro nos aplicaba quizzes.					
29. Los quizzes se aplicaban de forma espontánea y sin previo aviso.					
30. Cuando tenías un buen desempeño en los quizzes te sentías mas alentado a seguir estudiando.					
31. Sabía que tenía más oportunidad de pasar la materia cuando la calificación era promediada globalmente.					
32. Cuando la calificación se promediaba por habilidades, me resultaba más difícil alcanzar la calificación aprobatoria.					
33. El profesor mostró disposición para revisar o explicar el por qué de una calificación.					
34. Al final del curso la forma de calificar concordó con el explicado al inicio.					

B) Semi- structured interview:

Generales- Personales:

1. ¿Por qué decidiste estudiar Lengua Inglesa?
    Cuestiones:
    -   Económicas
    -   Emocionales
    -   Personales
    -   Realización como mujer/hombre.

2. ¿Cuáles eran tus aspiraciones cuando entraste a la Universidad?
3. ¿Dónde te gustaría trabajar?
4. ¿Qué curso de inglés o qué semestre reprobaste?
5. ¿Por qué reprobaste el curso de inglés?
6. ¿Trabajabas cuando reprobaste?
7. ¿Como organizabas tu horario cuando tomaste este curso?
8. ¿Dedicabas cierto tiempo a las tareas o a estudiar? ¿Cuánto tiempo?

Motivación:

9. ¿Tenías confianza con respecto a tus habilidades evaluadas en clase?(Speaking, Reading, writing, listening)
10. ¿Ayudabas con tus compañeros?
11. ¿Participabas en clase voluntariamente?
12. ¿Coordinabas actividades durante la clase (cuando se trabajaba en equipo)?
13. Cuando se te hacía difícil entender o aprender algo, (¿te retabas a ti mismo para resolverlo?)¿Qué hacías?
    - le preguntabas al maestro
    - practicabas a solas
14. ¿Cuál era tu reacción cuando te preguntaban algo y no sabías la respuesta?
15. ¿Crees que el esfuerzo que pusiste fue suficiente? ¿Por qué?
16. ¿Te consideras una persona con suerte?
17. ¿Crees que en algún momento la suerte influyó en tu proceso de aprendizaje?
18. ¿Crees que el hecho de reprobar ha sido uno de los motivos que te han animado o desanimado a seguir adelante?
19. ¿Te sentías atraído por la cultura Americana? ¿Por qué y de que forma?
    - ¿Tienes amigos extranjeros?
    - ¿escuchas música en ingles?
    - ¿ves películas en ingles?
20. ¿La relación entre tus compañeros y tu afectaba tu desempeño? Ejemplos.

Evaluación:
21. ¿Te afectó el que cambiaran la forma global de calificar a una por habilidades?
22. ¿Qué piensas de ese tipo de cambio?
23. ¿Qué criterios de evaluación utilizaban los maestros?
24. ¿Te gustaba esa forma de evaluación?
25. ¿Creías que te ayudaba en tu aprendizaje?
26. Los maestros ¿hacían retroalimentación después de los exámenes?
27. ¿Cuál era tu reacción ante las calificaciones?
28. ¿Cómo te preparabas para los exámenes?
29. ¿Cómo te evaluaban las habilidades lingüísticas en clase?
    - ¿Había retroalimentación?
    - y cuando había ¿que es lo que tu hacías?
30. ¿Qué calificación obtuviste? ¿Qué piensas? ¿Te la merecías? ¿Por qué?
31. ¿Los criterios planteados al principio del semestre concordó con la forma de calificar al final?
32. ¿Crees que las actividades eran muy difíciles de hacer/comprender?
33. Según tú, ¿Qué es lo que afectó tu desempeño en la clase de inglés?

* A parte se les hicieron preguntas personalizadas a cada uno dependiendo del tipo de respuestas.