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Adolescent Immigrant Students' Learning of Second Languages

Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyse the results of an educational intervention with adolescent immigrant students, focusing on the degree of influence that the affective factor, attitude, school adaptation and the use of Web 2.0 tools, specifically video blogs, have on oral practice within the process of teaching-learning a second language. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used for data collection, management and analysis. Out of all the results obtained, the most relevant is that carrying out a language teaching-learning process based on the aforementioned variables promotes a more positive attitude in adolescent immigrant students towards oral language practice and a greater involvement at school and in their teaching-learning process. By way of conclusion, respecting these affectivity-related variables gets these types of students, who are new to the education system, on the right track to a more satisfactory oral practice.

Keywords: *blog, school adaptation, attitude, affectivity*

Introduction

Respecting the affective factor is one of the main bases for the success of both learning and teaching second languages to immigrant students (Arnold, 2000; Cabañas Martínez, 2008; García Mateos, 2008; Instituto Cervantes, 2006, Garay, 2011). Many studies have analysed different aspects of the affective dimension in second language acquisition: self-esteem and oral production (Heyde 1979), self-esteem and listening comprehension, or self-esteem and performance in L2

(Gholam-Ali Kalanzadeh, et al., 2013). These studies reveal that the affective dimension must be considered as one of the determining factors in successful learning (Goleman: 1995; Stevick: 1998) and in language acquisition, at least in the area of oral communication (Arnold: 2007; van Lier:2008; Hablart 2013). On the same line, Arnold (2000, 2007) specifies that the relationship between the language teaching-learning process and the affective factor is two-way, which makes it necessary for language learning to be worked on together with more complex cognitive theories (Sorden, 2012; Zahir, 2013), and alongside the concept of emotional intelligence (Cabañas Martínez, 2009). This new perspective of complexity, apart from presenting new research challenges in the field of language learning, sheds fresh light on considering the practical benefits of this new vision of pedagogy (Mercer, 2012).

School adaptation has been studied by Vila (1999) and Níkleva (2009), who point out that, apart from actually wanting to learn a language, it is essential to feel comfortable in the world around that language. This feeling, despite being felt in an individual sense, entails a collective responsibility, which underlines the importance of the linguistic and emotional reception given to recently-arrived students.

The possibility to bring genuine importance to the immigrant students' mother tongues increases to a great extent with the use of new technologies, which are also giving rise to new research perspectives: mobility learning environments (m-Learning) and Web 2.0 applications, such as blogs, paying attention to the intercultural context (Larrea, Raigón & Gómez, 2012) and to the different contexts of technology-mediated interaction (Coscollola & Agustó, 2010).

The choice of a video blog or audiovisual blog (vlog) finds its place in the previous perspective, being used as an instrument to introduce the immigrant students' own languages into the school, so that the immigrant students can take a central role in their process of learning the second language in question (Zhang & Zhao, 2011; Bustamante, Hurlbut & Moeller, 2012; Chartrand, 2012).

Methodology

The objective of this research project is to analyse the viability and effectiveness of using blogs for oral practice in the process of teaching-learning second languages based on respect for the affective factor. It starts with the factors that have an influence on the immigrant students' process of teaching-learning second languages: the students' attitude, feeling valued, school adaptation and Web resources. The study focuses on the observation of schools' current reality and educational intervention that takes into account the aforementioned factors, which will act as a basis on

which to open new roads to further oral language practice in immigrant students who have recently joined the compulsory secondary education system.

Taking the above into consideration on a theoretical level and using the objective described in the previous paragraph as a reference, five variables were determined as the basis of the study:

Table 1: Study variables

Name of the variable	Description
Attitude	The attitude shown by students towards the languages that they are learning.
Valued at school	Feeling valued is a condition for immigrant students' development in the process of teaching-learning a second language and for their adaptation to school.
Adaptation	School adaptation is a key factor in the development of second language learning, as the latter has a two-way relationship with the former: school adaptation benefits second language learning, and learning the language encourages adaptation.
Oral aspect	Oral practice in language learning is based on a communicative approach where the simultaneous use of all the languages involved is beneficial to the student.
Web 2.0 tools	The use of Web 2.0 tools furthers cooperative language learning and enables all students' languages to be present in the classroom for oral practice.

The coding to prepare the qualitative and quantitative data analysis was carried out on these variables. The mixed methodology requires there to be a variety of points of view. In our case, the perspectives of four groups taking part in the experience were selected, using the instruments that ensured the best level of reliability. The points of view and their data collection instruments are as follows:

- a. The researcher, collected in a comprehensive research log.
- b. Managers of the teaching centres (*Berritzegune*), through interviews.
- c. The teaching staff, with an open response survey.
- d. The participating students, through two closed response surveys (before and after the intervention).

To analyse the quantitative data, the SPSS 11.5 programme was used, through which the data was processed with a descriptive analysis founded on frequencies, percentages, standard deviations and significance based on the ANOVA. To carry out this analysis, data was obtained from the questionnaires handed out to the students before and after the educational intervention.

For the qualitative part, the data from the interviews and the researcher's log were analysed using the Atlas.ti 5.0 programme. A hermeneutic unit was created

in which the qualitative data were analysed by creating codes, memos, families and super families, obtaining two types of results: textual and on the relationship between variables summarised in codes.

Lastly, we must point out that the participants were 30 recently arrived students (who had been in Spain for less than 2 years) who were attending two Compulsory Secondary Education schools in Bizkaia (Spain), where they have to learn the two official languages of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country: Basque and Spanish

Results

The intervention unfolded with the creation of one video blog (vlog) per centre by the recently arrived immigrant students. The objective of the blogs was for future immigrant students to be able to quickly learn the basic structures they would need for the first few months at school in Spanish or Basque, so that they would feel a bit better and more confident. We will present the results of this intervention, following the order of the five variables that make up the research study. They will be mixed, qualitative and quantitative, to provide complete and unified results.

The first variable is what we call “**attitude**”. Under this heading, the relationship between the immigrant students’ attitude towards the languages they are learning and the influence that this has on their learning was analysed.

As regards their learning of Spanish as an L2, the data from the first survey showed that speaking Spanish was unpleasant for 63.3 %, although 56.7 % found it easy. Furthermore, even though they found the Spanish classes fun (66.7 %), they did not rate the activities carried out in class in the same way, claiming that they found them boring (53.3 %) albeit valid for learning purposes (63.3 %). Regarding Basque as an L2, the data showed a similar situation to the previous case, although this time with generally more favourable percentages.

After the intervention, and bearing in mind the duration of the said intervention (6 months), the questions that took on significance in their responses were the following: “The activities I do to learn in Spanish/Basque classes are valid or not valid”. Where the first survey with regard to the Spanish classes had found that 63.3 % considered them valid and 36.7 % not valid, after carrying out the activities that were put forward in the intervention (making blogs), the survey found that 89.5 % considered them valid as opposed to 10.5 % who claimed they were not. So, as regards Spanish language learners, the validity of the exercises carried out as part of the intervention has been proven.

As regards Basque, 27.3 % felt that the exercises they did in ordinary classes were no good for learning and 72.2 % felt that they were, despite them finding these classes more boring than the Spanish classes. After the intervention, the responses also improved, as 90.9 % found them valid and 9.1 % found them not valid. However, the most interesting point in this case is that they liked the activities more, finding them greater fun while also more useful for learning.

The second variable is “**feeling valued at school**,” which was considered to be an essential conditioning factor for ideal school adaptation and efficient teaching of second language oral practice. The assumption was that, in order for immigrant students to feel valued, it was crucial to place importance and real use on one of the key aspects of their identity: their language(s). Thus, from the analysis of the qualitative data, the immigrant students' languages were seen to be used at secondary school more as an anecdote than for real, actual communication, despite the teaching staff considering it important for students to keep up their mother tongues, to encourage their self-esteem and to preserve their roots.

As for the students' opinions, 80 % felt that using their language at school would be positive; 86.7 % would like to learn their mother tongue at school, and 95.5 % would like to be able to use their language to learn Basque, and 89.9 % to learn Spanish.

After the intervention, 84.4 % of the students gave a positive assessment of the presence of their languages to work on their oral practice of Spanish, and 90 % to work on their oral Basque. The reason for this was that they could show they were experts in those languages and because they could contribute something to the school.

The third variable is “**adaptation**”. School adaptation is a highly important variable in the student's learning process in general, but this has not been shown to occur in the same way with language learning. In other words, it is not clear whether school adaptation improves language learning or vice versa. In this study, after analysing the results, we observed that it appeared to have a two-way influence, and that the students' school adaptation had a positive influence on their attitudes towards the second language classes.

Together with this hypothesis we could see that over a third of the participating immigrant students that we surveyed had relationship problems both at school (40 %) and in class (43.3 %), in spite of the fact that most of the teachers felt that the students were suitably adapted to the school, although in many cases they confused school adaptation with the level of development in their studies or in their learning.

More specifically, 70 % of the students confessed to feeling bad in the language classes; 30 % indicated that they had a poor relationship with the teachers; and 40 % claimed to have a poor relationship with their classmates.

After the intervention, these data were considerably different: 83.3 % answered that they had felt good in class during the intervention; 80 % said that their relationship with their classmates had improved; and 86.7 % said their relationship with the teacher had improved. In general, 90 % said they felt good in the language classes. We can add here that the item (“In class I feel”) takes on relevant significance according to the ANOVA, and very close to that significance we also find the item: “my relationship with my classmates”.

In the fourth variable, “**oral aspect**,” three essential concepts come together, which are the basis of second language teaching: the communicative point of view; the teaching-learning process as a set of skills; and respect for affectivity. Thus, the noteworthy results from the quantitative point of view are that, for 70 % of the students learning Spanish and 63.6 % of the students learning Basque, the most important thing about the language is learning to speak. For 86.7 % speaking Spanish is nice, and for Basque this figure is 63.3 %, despite the fact that 90 % said it was difficult. These results coincide with the teachers’ perception, who felt that these students’ primary need and obligation was to learn to speak the language. In contrast, according to the students, in the Spanish classes (80 %) and Basque classes (72.2 %) they mostly learned to write and read (70 % in Spanish and 72.2 % in Basque). Together with the affective factor, we can say that 56.6 % of the students felt bad when they had to speak out loud in class.

After the intervention, these perceptions changed and the students indicated that, above all, they had practiced the language orally (78.9 % in Spanish and 81.8 % in Basque), which is significant, and they claimed that oral language practice had not been so stressful for them as it had been in their everyday practice in the classroom.

Finally, we come to the “**Web 2.0 tools**” variable, where we focus on verifying if the use of Web 2.0 tools encourages cooperative teaching-learning of languages and their oral skill. Furthermore, the use of blogs enables a set of language skills to be developed and for all the students’ languages to be present in the classroom.

From the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative results, we can point out that one of the main features of the active methodology is that it must be cooperative, as cooperation arises from the very essence of Web 2.0. In the intervention, the students talk among themselves constantly in their mother tongue and in the L2, and they give this group experience a positive evaluation, both for what they have learned about the language and for the relationships that they have forged.

In addition, it must be noted that 70 % of the students who took part in the survey use web tools for: speaking with friends (51.7 %), looking up information (44.8 %) and studying (3.4 %). They do not, however, use them for learning

languages (73.3 %) or in language classes (Spanish 73.3 % and Basque 90 %); but 85 % would like to use them for these purposes. After the intervention, 85 % liked seeing their work posted on the Web, 83.3 % liked it that their classmates could enter, see and rate their blog work, and 80 % liked the fact that their teachers could do the same. For all these reasons, 83.3 % wanted to continue using the Internet to learn languages in the future.

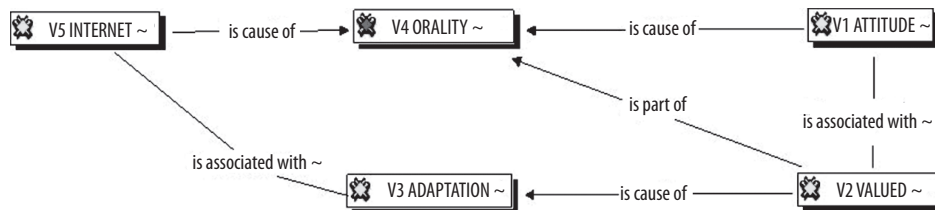
Thus, in the analysis of the results, significance was observed through the ANOVA in the item “I use the Internet to learn languages”. These results are justified because they almost always work on paper in the classroom, and using the Internet gave them the chance to create real material themselves, which gave the work a deep sense of reality and meaning. Web 2.0 tools help to boost an active methodology, which makes immigrant students feel more a part of the decisions that are being made, which in turn helps to improve relationships between students, and between students and teachers, proving to be a positive drive in the process of school adaptation.

Discussion

In order to reach a series of final conclusions that would open new paths of research, after analysing the qualitative data on each variable and using the aforementioned Atlas.ti 5.0 programme, we drew up a general outline representing the relationships of the variables in the hierarchical order.

As shown on the following concept map (Figure 1), the oral aspect is the main variable and all the others are positioned around it.

Figure 1: Hierarchical relationships between variables. Atlas.ti 5.0



With equal importance and at the same level as oral practice, both Internet use (Web 2.0 tools) (variable 5) and attitude (variable 1) have a relationship in which they are the “cause” of oral language learning (variable 4). Consequently, the

presence of all the students' languages in the second language classroom cannot be merely anecdotal, but rather they must play a relevant role. This is because the presence and use of these languages make the recently arrived students feel valued (variable 3) within the second language teaching-learning process, as they turn the students into experts in something and enable a part of their identity to be shared with their classmates and teachers. It is precisely in the efficient management of this cooperative and collaborative teaching process where the use of Web 2.0 tools is fundamental. True communication, the ultimate purpose of all languages, is at the heart of oral language practice and learning; it also promotes a positive attitude towards new languages, which has an effect on the educational practice itself.

For all these reasons, the attitude variable (variable 1), despite being at the first level in the hierarchy, is also associated with the feeling valued variable (variable 2), a cornerstone in language teaching aimed at adolescent immigrant students, who are not linguistically illiterate, and where the individual factors of each student (self-esteem, personality and motivation) are particularly relevant on the path to building their own personality, switching between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the first language and the new languages that they must learn to form part of the new society in which they are now living.

Lastly, we can note that, at this second level of the hierarchy, we find the adaptation variable (variable 3) which is represented as a result of feeling valued, i.e., feeling valued is the cause of greater adaptation. At the same time, however, it is also associated with the use of a cooperative methodology that, as we have already pointed out, is promoted by the Web 2.0 tools (variable 5).

This is why we feel that it would be interesting for future research to be based on continuing to analyse in greater depth the existing relationship between school adaptation and the second language teaching-learning process aimed at immigrant students. It would also be fitting to extend this intervention to students in other education centres, cities and provinces, to be able to compare results, and to create new experiences to prepare students for the use of Web 2.0 tools aimed at language learning, to foster channels that can enable second language teaching and learning to be active, communicative and multilingual, through the different resources that the Internet offers.

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