



UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO

División de Ciencias Políticas y Humanidades

**Secondary school students' motivation when studying
in a private institution: Issues and challenges**

MONOGRAFÍA

Para obtener el grado de:

LICENCIADO EN LENGUA INGLESA

Presenta

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this professional experience dissertation is to tell every reader the occurrence I had at working in an English-teaching private school, in this case, Harmon Hall. Not only the experience I got working there, but the strategies I used such as team work or visual aids that helped me the moment I had to teach teenagers who were not interested in learning English or those who were there just because their parents sent them to the English classes. This dissertation will also describe the working methods, the trainings and the different levels of English I taught to gain experienced while teaching at Harmon Hall.

Teaching English is something many people think is an easy job. However, it is a job where teachers have to work the hardest to get the students best. The most difficult population to teach is the teens. They are not really motivated to learn anything including English; in this dissertation, I would describe my experience regarding students' motivation when studying English. While I was teaching them I found out that they do not like going to an English class for learning, they are not really interested or happy to go, during my experience working with them at Harmon Hall I found an alternative to teach students who are at the secondary school and maybe high school that are not motivated to go to English classes. Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled a person seeks to fulfill the next one, and so on. Another motivation theory is the one Hawkins (1993) defines as "what drives or induces a person to behave in a particular fashion. The internal force which initiates, directs, sustains and terminates all important activities. It influences the level of performance, the efficiency achieved and the time spent on an activity." The teenagers I worked with did not have a goal to learn English; that could have been what shapes the unmotivated behavior I was facing in classes. A reason for working especially with teenagers is that many people also consider them as a population of

people who never care about anything, so teaching them is like the most difficult task a teacher can face and the most challenging job during the professional working time.

In order to describe my experience while working with teenagers, I will explain some factors that might be affecting the classroom environment when teaching English to teenagers. I wanted to understand them and get to know them better, so they could show me why they did not like english classes or why they just left the school I was working in. Some teens just found this class the most difficult one they could have ever had, or sometimes they found this class the most boring one, in other words, these factors could have affected their performance in class or in other words their motivation. When I had a previous talk to only some of them the most common answer was the interest they did not have due to the topics presented and their personal activities like going to school or taking other classes like sports, dancing, or playing instruments. Those factors made them feel like english classes were just boring and hard.

I found interesting working with teens because they are in a moment of their lives when learning becomes a process of importance and when they start facing new things they have never learned before, a good example is english. Students are also understanding their likes and dislikes and they can say if something is good, interesting for them or they can even know if something will help them in the future, the thing is that they consider having a sports class more attractive than an english class.

During my own process of learning how to deal with teens, I had many doubts and many mistakes that I would definitely mention in this monograph in order to make other future teachers aware of these issues. The way I started working with them was not appropriate

and it was not based on any theory, it was only based on my instinct and on my way to transmit the same way my teachers transmitted their knowledge, having the same strategies and the same examples, of course working with new generations will never be the same. That is something I learned through experience, not by reading a book. Although the preparation I gained while at the University of Quintana Roo gave me the tools to face these students, experience was definitively what allowed me to get a better idea of how to manage students of this age.

The objective of this dissertation is to describe how I dealt with this problem many teachers have and what my results were, telling anecdotes and some special situations I had with teens and even with their parents. Also, I hope that with this monograph many future teachers could get an idea of how teaching teenagers is. Also, I want to share the experience I had with different levels of english learners and why I am saying teens are the hardest to teach and deal with. I want to provide some examples of strategies that failed and some others that had excellent results in my performance as a teacher. Besides, I want to share some ideas of dynamics practiced in class, ways to approach each student and some extra material a teacher can use for their teens. I want to make clear that I worked with groups that had around 6 to 10 students, so the approach was better and the communication I had with them was really personalized. The suggestions I will present in this monograph could be helpful within a context with the same characteristics I had, but maybe if we are talking about larger groups the ideas could be useless. The thing is, I did not have the opportunity to work with really large groups, but if I had, I think I would definitely change some of the dynamics and my approach to students would be less direct. I hope that by reading this monograph, future teachers would have a better idea of how working with teens is and what strategies can be used with them in order to present a more attractive class. It is my desire

that the suggestions and ideas I offer in this dissertation could be of use for future teachers. Also, the material described in this monograph can change according to the time and generation of teens we could be teaching, so this monograph could be a helpful tool for future generations with the appropriate adaptations.

II.CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section of this dissertation, I am now going to give an overview of the private school where I have worked, the students, the teachers and the material we used in this particular context

The institution where I started teaching since I began the English Language Teaching major was Harmon Hall, Chetumal. The school was specialized in teaching english to different levels, from kids to adults and with three different programs. The one I want to focus in this dissertation is the pre-teens one in which students from secondary school have to go from Monday to Thursday. Students take classes from 3:30 to 4:30 and from 4:30 to 5:30. Students who take these classes are teens that also have english classes in their schools and they go to Harmon Hall in order to improve their school grades. The classes that students take have a duration of only one hour, so the information students get is almost non and they do not acquire what they really need to learn. It is important to mention that due to the fact they take classes at their regular schools, they have already seen most of the topics and they find these repetitive, a factor that affects students' motivation.

A. Harmon Hall

Harmon Hall is a well-known english institution that has diverse schools all around Mexico, the first one opened in 1969 in Mexico City, in Chetumal the first Harmon Hall School opened the 7th of July, 2008. This school is located in Chetumal downtown at Juarez Avenue between Alvaro Obregón and Othon P. Blanco and counts with a population of four hundred students. Of these students, around one hundred are teenagers attended in the different schedules the school offers, at 3:30 in the afternoon from Monday to Thursday or Saturday schedule from 9 to 1 pm ..

Harmon Hall's methodology is to teach people in English only, no Spanish words or instructions are given in Spanish. Harmon Hall believes that if people learn a language with the target language only, they will acquire it better than by translating it into their mother tongue. Harmon Hall has different people in charge in every institution; they have a principal, who is in charge of the promotion of the school and the finances. The academic coordinator is the one who is in charge of teachers, he checks planning and observes classes, he also interviews future students to place them in a course and checks lists and updates information about re-enrollments. The school is very careful about the students' permanence; if a student leaves, they have to replace that student with a new one so the population does not decrease. Write a closing sentence here.

B. Pre-teens

Pre-teens is the course I am going to focus in this monograph, the reason is that the population of students that had little or no motivation were there, these students were teenagers from twelve to fifteen years old. The program consists of sixteen courses in four different levels, each course lasts two months. During the course, students have two units divided in two lessons, one review section and a project; they also have one middle quiz and a final exam with an oral part in both. They also have a cyber-class where they practice all the topics seen in the unit, they usually go for certain periods of time every course and they have thirty minutes to complete the tasks they are supposed to do. Another thing I would like to add is that it was more common to have more girls than boys in a pre-teens class, girls were a little bit more interested in class, boys mostly took everything as a joke and they did not like to be artistic, painting or role-playing. This course was designed for teens that were in secondary school, which means that in a class we could have people from first, second or third grade, even sixth grades could attend to a teenager's class.

C. Teachers

First of all, the most important part of every school is their teachers, without them the school would never work, so for Harmon Hall having trained teachers is really important.

What I mean by trained teachers is that the people working at the school have to apply the method the school has developed, so we have to take many exams and modules that explain how we need to work with students and how the particular methodology of the school are the most appropriated according to the school principles. Each module describes the content of the courses, the materials, the goals and the expected results when finishing the course. The trained teachers have to develop that methodology exactly during the classes because, as I mentioned before, the school has a particular method and we need to follow it. A teacher normally has around 3 or 4 classes a day so, we have to follow different materials provided by the school, like books or visual aids. The school has different programs, kids, pre-teens and adults, so depending the course and program we had to teach, we used the necessary material to present our classes, for example, with kids we used toys and songs, with teens we used posters and with adults we used cues and visual aids. I worked in all the programs and I learned the different ways to work with each program, level and course.

D. Material

Each program (kids, pre-teen and adults) has its own material and the material is provided to the teacher in order to plan the class. Our materials are teachers edition books, CDs, DVDs, cyber web pages, visuals and cues. Every lesson includes grammar or vocabulary, so the school is the one providing that specific material we would need at the moment of teaching, according to the lesson and according to the planned class.

The books we use are titled *Kids Box*, *Connect* and *Touchstone*. The second mentioned, “Connect” is the one we use for teens and that book includes some daily activities teens have, the artists of the moment and some strategies a teen would understand due to the

short grammar explanation the book provides, so it is an easy book to work with. CDs and DVDs are complements for some specific classes in which students have to reinforce what they have learned during the week. The DVDs are only used for kids and *Touchstone*, *Connect* does not have a DVD but has their own web page for students to practice (www.connectarcade.com).

E. Environment

The role of a teacher is to teach and everybody knows that but, at Harmon Hall, a teacher is not only the person who teaches, it is a lot more . When a class is given and a student does not understand something the teacher is the one to set a time and day for the student to have an extra help class, in that way the teacher makes sure that the student is learning better. The problem comes when a student is absent; the teacher is the one responsible to call their parents and ask the reason the teen did not come to class. If for any reason, the student did not come, the teacher is again the one responsible for setting a time and day for extra help. We have an academic coordinator, and he is the one who makes sure the teacher is making calls and gives the service the school promises to give. Another responsibility teachers have is the re-enrollment of each student. When the time comes a teacher has to call parents and remind them about the week they have to re-enroll their kids, it is compulsory and we have to do it because if we lose a student, the school is going to take it as our fault. Re-enrolling students is something really hard because not always the reason is the service, sometimes other extra problems become more important like money, time to dedicate to the class or moving to a different city. However, as the institution is a private one, losing a student is not good for any teacher and for the school.

F. Students and Grading

This is something really hard to describe, the students the school has are really different, some are shy, others are extrovert, some try to learn and struggle with it, others are really smart, among others; because of that we faced a lot of challenges with some special kids and why not, some special parents.

Each program has their population but focusing only on teens, they are the hardest. First of all because as I mentioned before, they come from different well-known schools so they have a level of english or in the worst case they do not have any level at all. Some of the students at the school are wealthy, so they sometimes tend to be rude or spoiled and when they have their class they normally reject the rest of the group or the class itself. On the other hand, as I said some of them have a good level so teaching them becomes easier and dynamic because you do not lose time explaining a lot of things, their grades are higher and the parents get satisfied due to their kids performance at school.

At Harmon Hall students are graded in different ways, they have some particular points they have to follow and based on those points the teachers give the grade in participation, for example, if they bring material, do homework, speak only english and of course participate in class they get a 10 in their participation, the teachers are the ones who decide if they get that 10 or less. What else is graded, just this?

Another way to grade students is by having final exams. In the final exams they are supposed to know all they have learned during the course in a summarized way and right to the point; that parameter has some percentage that is added at the end of the course with some other grading components. In all the courses, each part has a percentage: 40% final written exam, 40% final oral exam, 10% participation and 10% portfolio. At the end of

each course teachers give students the correct grade and give the final grade to students so they are aware of how much they get in that course.

The portfolio is a special section in their books where students record all they have done in the course, the way a teacher grades it is by reading the content and assigning the grade with some parameters that the school have established before and teachers must have taken that training in order to give the correct grade.

III. REVIEW LITERATURE

What's motivation?

The review presented in this chapter is divided in three main sections. First, different definitions are presented in order to understand what motivation is, then different factors identified as affecting motivation are described, and finally some strategies to motivate students suggested by some authors are presented.

According to Brown (1994), one of the more complicated problems of second language learning and teaching has been defining and applying the construct of motivation in the classroom. On the one hand, it is an easy catchword that gives teachers a simple answer to the mysteries of language learning.

“Motivation is the difference”, I have heard people say, “Between success and failure. If they're motivated, they'll learn, and if not, they won't. that simplification may hold some of the time. Why not all the time? Just what is motivation? Can it be acquired or is it just “there”? Can it be taught? Where does it come from? Are there different kinds of motivation? If you don't carefully face questions like these, you run the risk of passing off motivation as a short, simple answer to learner success when it is neither short nor simple. Ironically, it is indeed probably right, but only when its full complexity is recognized and applied appropriately in the language classroom. (Brown, 1994: 33).

(Keller 1983) states that “Motivation” refers to the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in this respect” (p. 3). Motivation is defined as the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors. Motivation is what causes us to act, whether it is getting a glass of water to reduce thirst or reading a book to gain knowledge. It involves the biological, emotional, social, and cognitive forces that activate behavior.

In everyday usage, the term motivation is frequently used to describe why a person does something. "The term motivation refers to factors that activate, direct, and sustain goal-directed behavior... Motives are the "whys" of behavior - the needs or wants that drive behavior and explain what we do. We don't actually observe a motive; rather, we infer that one exists based on the behavior we observe." (Nevid 2013).

Ur (2012) states that another motivation-associated concept is that of the self and personal identity: how we see ourselves or wish to see ourselves in the future. A student who sees him-or herself as high-achieving, for example, will invest more effort in learning. A student that wishes to see him- or herself as a member of an international community will want to learn English in order to fulfill his or her own personal aspirations (p.10).

As suggested by Gardner (2005) motivation is multifaceted, and it has been defined in different ways by different researchers in psychology and other scientific disciplines. Thus, a simple definition is, therefore, not possible.

Brown (2007) proposed three different approaches to motivation: behavioral, cognitive and constructivist.

1. From a *Behavioral* perspective, motivation is seen in very matter of fact terms. In a behavioral view, performance in tasks- and motivation to do so- is likely to be at the mercy of external forces: parents, teachers, peers, educational requirements, job specifications, and so forth.
2. In *cognitive* terms, motivation places much more emphasis on the individual's decisions, "the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and the degree effort they will exert in that respect".

3. A *constructivist* view of motivation places even further emphasis on social context as well as individual personal choices. Each person is motivated differently, and will therefore act on his or her environment in ways that are unique.

Another motivational dichotomy that superficially resembles the well-known pair originally introduced by the Canadian researchers is Brown's differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Based on the work of Deci (1975) and several others, Brown (2000) defines **intrinsic motivation** as pursuing an activity such as language learning for its own sake, with the learner often incurring a sense of self-actualization or self-determination. **Extrinsic motivation** is just the opposite: All the rewards are outside of the language learner and external to language learning well.

According to Parrot (1993) motivation is sometimes characterized as being integrative or instrumental. These terms apply principally to the context of a community which speaks a language which, in the wider context, is regarded as a minority language (for example, but not necessarily, an immigrant community). Integrative motivation refers to the wish to identify with the larger community, while instrumental motivation refers to the need to learn (for example, for educational or occupational purposes).

Integrative motivated learners want to learn the target language so that they can better understand and get to know the people who speak the language and mix up in their culture. Integrative motivation refers to "...an openness to identify at least in part with another language community" (Gardner and Masgoret, 2003:126). Learners with instrumental motivation want to learn a language because of a practical reason such as getting a salary/bonus or getting into college.

What could be the factors that affect motivation?

Brophy, (2004) emphasized that in the field of foreign/second language (L2) learning, motivation has long been recognised as one of the key factors that determine L2 achievement and attainment. Motivation serves as the initial engine to generate learning and later functions as an ongoing driving force that helps to sustain the long and usually laborious journey of acquiring a foreign language. Indeed, it is fair to say that without sufficient motivation even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language proficiency, whereas most learners with strong motivation can achieve a working knowledge of the L2, regardless of their language aptitude or any undesirable learning conditions.

Motivation is multifaceted and because of this feature is affected by diverse factors such as attitude, personality and age among others. In responses to an open-ended survey question, teachers and school-based administrators who are registered users of the Education Week website, described the greatest challenges they face in engaging and motivating students. An analysis of responses indicates that lack of parental support and student apathy were the most commonly cited obstacles.

Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern and Todesco (1996) mentioned that attitude and motivation were in many instances the best overall predictors of success in second language learning. It appears that attitude may be more important at certain stages of language learning than at others. In addition, positive attitude may be a necessary but it is certainly not a sufficient condition for success in learning a second language. Furthermore, most of the studies that have related attitudes to success in second language learning have found that students

possessing an integrative motivation are more likely to succeed than students with an instrumental motivation.

Some studies have found that personality and behavior affect motivation. Dweck, (1988) stated that the task for investigators of motivation and personality is to identify major patterns of behavior and link them to underlying psychological processes. Motivation is built around goals and goal-oriented behavior as well. At the same time, it represents an approach to personality in that it identifies individual differences in beliefs and values that appear to generate individual differences in behavior. For example, if a student will go to another country where English is spoken, he or she would like to speak the language because everything would be in the target language; that is a goal for communicating with speakers. Now talking about values or beliefs, a student would like to learn the language because maybe all the family of that teenager speaks English and it is a must for everybody to speak it.

According to Hinkel (1999) The shared knowledge in verbal behavior refers to the familiar conventions followed in using language, which make it easier for us to “interpret” or “make sense” of one another’s utterances and actions. Thus, real and open communication will not be possible without a shared language (p.77).

Negativity also affects motivation, in line with the negative cognitions and negative affect, the helpless children showed marked decrements in performance across the failure trials. In short, helpless children viewed their difficulties as failures, as indicate of low ability, and as insurmountable. They appeared to view further effort as futile and, perhaps, as their defensive maneuvers suggest, as further documentation of their inadequate ability (Dweck 1988).

Culture and other factors can affect motivation due to the fact that sometimes students do not understand well something and get frustrated with it. As Kramsch (1993) mentioned culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them (p. 1).

Take, for example, the first scenario above. The child is already comfortable at home and at school. He can take either of two routes: He may easily become complacent and tell himself that all is well at home and as such, there is no need to work hard. Here, it is the intrinsic motivation otherwise called self-motivation, which is needed to push this student to take the better route which would be to apply himself in order to become a success story like his father, brother or someone else whom he has adopted as role model and to bring gratification to those who have made the way easy for him.

Take the second scenario where the child comes from a less than favorable home environment. This student also has two options: He may, from sheer determination to access a better life in the future, push himself to the edge to achieve success. Conversely, he may succumb, as many do, and let his adverse circumstances dictate his future.

(Maslow, 1943) states the following motivation conclusions:

1. The integrated wholeness of the organism must be one of the foundation stones of motivation theory.

2. The hunger drive (or any other psychological drive) was rejected as a centering point or model for a definitive theory of motivation. Any drive that is somatically based and localizable was shown to be atypical rather than typical in human motivation.
3. Such a theory should stress and center itself upon ultimate or basic goals rather than partial or superficial ones, upon ends rather than a means to these ends.
4. There are usually available various cultural paths to the same goal. Therefore conscious, specific, local-cultural desires are not as fundamental in motivation theory as the more basic, unconscious goals.
5. Any motivated behavior, either preparatory or consummatory, must be understood to be channel through which many basic needs may be simultaneously expressed or satisfied.
6. Practically all organismic states are to be understood as motivated and as motivating.
7. Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need.
8. Any classification of motivations must deal with the problem of levels of specificity or generalization the motives to be classified.
9. Classifications of motivations must be based upon goals rather than upon instigation drives or motivated behavior.
10. Motivation theory should be human-centered rather than animal-centered. (p 2,3)

Motivating Students

Wong Fillmore (1991) viewed three conditions necessary for learning L2.

- a) The need of motivated students to learn target language.
- b) Native speaker's support to learn.
- c) Contact between native speaker of target language and learners.

Motivation is an important element in every language classroom. Thus, motivating students is a task all teachers need to take into account when planning classes since the classroom environment affects students' motivation. The ways that experienced language teachers interact with both individuals and their classes as wholes are governed by a desire to maintain social harmony within their class groups. As a general rule language teachers should ensure that the social atmosphere of the classroom is neither too serious not too light hearted. A balance between these two extremes is desirable. (p. 272)

Age is another factor that affects motivation. According to Thomson & Rubin (1994) an early start allows people to pursue language study over longer periods of time, there is little evidence that children in language classrooms learn foreign languages any better than adults (people over 15) in similar classrooms situations. In fact, adults have many advantages over children: better memories, more efficient ways of organizing information, longer attention spans, better study habits, and greater ability to handle complex mental tasks. However, adults are often better motivated than children.

Torres Alonso (2007) states that the ages thirteen to eighteen coincide with a time of rapid translation and change, both mentally and physically. As teenagers begin to develop more their cognitive ability, they can be exposed to language learning techniques that require more logical and/ or abstract thinking. Attention span begins to lengthen, but there are also

more distractions of emotional nature, this is perhaps due to the physical changes they experience during this period of their lives. Ego and self-esteem are their “peak momentums”, and a teenager can be incredibly sensitive to the ways other see their physical, mental, and emotional development. Real or perceived errors can shatter confidence and detract from risk-taking (p. 12-13).

Most discussions about motivating techniques are based on the idealistic belief that “all the students are motivated to learn under the right conditions, and that you can provide these conditions in your classroom” (McCombs & Pope 1994:vii). Unfortunately, this assumption is not necessarily true in every case. Realistically, it is highly unlikely that everybody can be motivated to learn everything and even generally motivated students are not equally keen on every subject matter (Dörnyei, 2001).

One of the most important things a school can do is motivate students to learn about the world around them. This is the first step of learning, before any learning material is ever transferred to students. Learners must ultimately feel a sense of accomplishment because of their new knowledge and skills. Teachers can help them in many ways to attain this feeling, including effectively teaching them important material. Schools must endorse a particular motivation theory and teach accordingly.

According to Dörnyei (2003) research on L2 motivation grounded in concrete classroom situations and focusing on actual learning processes has considerable educational potential, particularly in two areas: (a) the systematic development of *motivational strategies* that can be applied to generate and maintain motivation in learners and (b) the formulation of *self-motivating strategies* that enable L2 learners themselves to take personal control of the affective conditions and experiences that shape their subjective involvement in learning (p. 23).

Dörnyei (1994) suggests the following guidelines to motivate students in the classroom:

1) Include a sociocultural component in the L2 syllabus by sharing positive L2- related experiences in class, showing films or TV recordings, playing relevant music, and inviting interesting native speaking guests.

2) Develop learners' cross-cultural awareness systematically by focusing on cross-cultural similarities and not just differences, using analogies to make the strange familiar, and using "culture teaching" ideas and activities.

3) Promote student contact with L2 speakers by arranging meetings with L2 speakers in your country; or, if possible, organizing school trips or exchange programs to the L2 community; or finding pen-friends for your students.

4) Develop learners' instrumental motivation by discussing the role L2 plays in the world and its potential usefulness both for themselves and their community.

5) Develop students' self-confidence by trusting them and projecting the belief that they will achieve their goal; regularly providing praise, encouragement, and reinforcement; making sure that students regularly experience success and a sense of achievement; helping remove un-certainties about their competence and self-efficacy by giving relevant positive examples and analogies of accomplishment; counter-balancing experiences of frustration by involving students in more favorable, "easier" activities; and using confidence-building tasks (p. 281).

The most powerful motivation, however, is intrinsic motivation for no matter how favorable external factors are, unless a student has set goals that he is determined to

achieve, he can easily be side tracked by factors such as peer pressure, complacency or simply his own indecisiveness.

Theory in my classes.

We all understand what it means when someone tells us they are "in the zone"; indeed, any given individual is likely to have experienced this feeling at some point throughout their lives. At those times, when we are "in the zone", we are aware of it and others can also see it in us: we lose track of the time and become completely engaged in the task at hand. This sense of abandonment and focus is at the heart of the concept of *flow* as outlined by (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) where people become completely lost in the moment and time and outside influences fall away. Thus, flow is a highly focused motivational state – some would say that it is the ultimate task engagement - When motivation, cognition and emotion are fully aligned with the task under completion. The powerful drive evident in flow is in some respects akin to the drive visible in DMCs: in both cases people are highly engrossed in what they are doing, leading to the concerns of the outside world becoming secondary to the powerful motivational current consuming their attention (Dörnyei, Muir and Ibrahim 2015). In other words, I changed the classroom environment making them forget the outside world by showing and bringing things they liked, since music to fashion and focus only in what I showed in class.

IV. MEMORY

In this section of the dissertation, I am going to describe the different challenges I face while teaching teenagers at Harmon Hall, Chetumal. I would also like to share some of the strategies I applied in order to motivate teens that went to Harmon Hall during my working time. My experience as a teacher began the moment I entered the university. Since I enrolled in the major, I started working at Harmon Hall in Chetumal. On July 7th, 2008 the school opened for the first time in the city having two hundred students and six teachers, me included. Before the school opened, I was hired to give promotion of the school going to others schools and giving flyers to people passing by, so they knew the school, this happened a month before the institution started giving service to the community.

Teachers at Harmon Hall are supposed to be trained to teach as the school has its own program and method for teaching, only the target language is used when learning in every single program, kids, pre-teens and adults. However, I did not have this because they hired me one Friday and opened on Monday, so they only explained to me the most important things in one day and gave me material to teach on Monday. The planning was based on the book, which made it easier for me to plan, but not for putting it into practice. I started teaching and facing different challenges. I will explain these in the following section.

1. Touchstone

The first program I worked with was *Touchstone*; they named it that way because that is the book Harmon Hall uses in the Adults' course. My class was formed by eight students from fifteen to twenty years of age; they were teenagers but working with them was really easy as they were new and some of them were mature enough to work and they were eager to learn; I used some material I designed like flashcards, cues and posters so these always had things that helped them to learn and the ones who were slower could always have a look and check if they were doing well. For me this course was not a challenge, even though

they were teens they did not acted rudely or they did not get bored with the topics taught or the grammar presented, they just did what a normal student is supposed to do.

2. Kids

The kids program was again not a challenge, as they were really young and active I could easily work with them, again I made some useful material that attracted them and made them participate in class; I made some posters where students had to match depending on the vocabulary I presented like colors, I put the color and students paste the name of the color. Working with kids was not as hard as I thought at the beginning, actually I liked it, because they were artistic and really smart, whatever I brought or used with them worked. Sometimes, they wanted me to bring the same material again or they gave me ideas to make it more fun.

3. Pre-Teens program

The program named pre-teens, which consists on sixteen courses and four levels (intro, basic, intermediate and advanced) was focused on teens from twelve to fifteen years; it was similar to the adults' program but the difference was that the activities were easier and longer than the other . There is where my experience as a teacher took another route, because some teens had a good level of English or got bored really fast, so I had to motivate these teens differently because they were attending school just because their parents pushed them to go, they were not happy or eager to learn anything. This students liked to have their cellphones every class, they never stopped using them, it was stressing as whenever I wanted them to work they secretly took out their cell and started chatting in class, as a consequence they did not learn much.

At this point, I realized they were into music and videogames, so I changed my classes into their likes, for example, instead of showing normal people I brought pictures of their favorite singers to make examples, another thing I did was using written examples to teach grammar listing videogames or movies I knew they liked, that gave me an excellent result because every class my students knew I was going to show something they liked or talk about things they like to do. So I was gaining experience teaching kids, teens and adults; I was gaining experience, putting into practice my knowledge gained in the ELT major classes and most importantly, experience.

4. Students' difference.

As it is usual not every single thing I did worked for every student or every class, I mentioned that I used the things they liked to make them feel interested in class but in some specific cases that did not work as I expected; the group was comprised of teens that were around fifteen years old and that seemed to hate each other. A common problem in classrooms is that some students cannot work together as there is no tolerance among them and they have personal problems. Those are factors that make the environment really tense and the teacher's work is affected as they do not want to participate or have a relationship with some of the students. I had a group like that, they were seven boys and two girls; the two girls did not want to work with any of the boys and the boys were split into three groups, the two older ones, three quiet ones and two who were always left behind; I have to mention that the ones who were quiet were the ones who knew the most English, the rest were just there because their parents send them to Harmon Hall.

In order to get their attention, I started being nice and friendly with all of them. I let them worked as they wanted to, but the results were not what I expected; I thought that if I were kind to them and let them work alone they would pay back with good behavior and with

better results. However, the problem was that they felt more comfortable and of course they worked less than at the beginning, from having half of the pages done, now they had only one exercise done in ten minutes or less. I realized that students have to have rules. Teachers cannot let students take the time they want to work. Another problem, I had was that as they did not work on their book the results in their quizzes were worse, from having a grade of 6 later they had grades of 3. I could not let this happen because at Harmon Hall after you have a group another teacher takes it the next level and if you did not do a good job the other teacher would have major problems, so this is what I did.

First of all, I reminded myself I was the teacher there, I was not their friend nor their classmate, so whatever I wanted to be done had to be done; they could not rule the classroom. I changed the interaction approach in one day. I started changing their seats, we have to place students according to their necessities, if they cannot see well or if they misbehaved frequently we can place them at the front, a teacher needs to know their students well. I change everybody to a different place, separating the groups; even though they argued and showed me their discontent, I did it. Next thing I did was to write their names on the board in alphabetic order, there I explained that I was going to write their grades and the person who got the most homework done and the best grade would not take the final exam. Finally, I made them sign a contract where it was stipulated that if they had more than 3 pieces of homework or exercises missing I would call their parents and send them with the academic coordinator. When I started doing these things student continued working in the same manner as before, but when I took the first students out and called their parents in front of them they realized I was not joking and they began to work more.

Although I was still kind, I also wanted them to see me as the authority in the classroom. Davis (2014) states that showing authority in class can be beneficial for classroom environment and consequently for students learning. By giving a structure to the classroom environment teachers are helping students to focus. Davis (2014) highlights the pros of being a strict teacher, these are the points stated:

1. Makes students adhere to class structure which increases opportunities to learn. Students normally behave better, so unwanted behavior does not interfere with the lesson as much.
2. It teaches the students about responsibility for their actions. Students learn they have choices to make and they are held responsible for what they do. Example: No homework= stay after class to do homework.
3. The rules are clearly known to the students so they know what is expected of them. A strict educator will make the rules known to the students because he wants everyone to abide. Therefore, the students are clear on what is expected.
4. Students tend to be more respectful.

As you can see authority gives students a structure to behave in class and in my teaching experience it works. Changing my interaction approach was something beneficial for the class as you can see below. The next chart shows what my results were in three stages, beginning, middle and end of the course.

4.1 Chart 1.

Students	Beginning	Middle	End
Student 1	7	5	8
Student 2	7	5	9
Student 3	6	5	8
Student 4	8	7	10
Student 5	8	8	10
Student 6	8	6	9
Student 7	6	4	7
Student 8	5	3	7
Student 9	5	3	6
Average	6.6	5.1	8.2

These were the results at the end of the course; I have to mention that the process lasted two months, as we can see from the students' grades, learning raised from 6.6 to the average of 8.2.

I realized that we as teachers cannot let students do as they want. We have our methods and they work, if not, we have to change them a little or completely, but the point is we have to keep the control of our students and they have to follow our rules. Teachers are authorities in the classroom and if students do not see any authority they will do whatever they want without hesitating.

5. Bullying

Bullying is a trendy topic in schools these days, it existed before but now things are getting worse among students. Nowadays, they are even killing other students just for the fact that they do not like them as a person, the reasons they present are just invalid but for them it is

fair to bully a student just because they do not like him or her. I had little experience with this problem because as the class lasted for an hour time, it did not let them time for bullying each other. As I was there, they stopped themselves for doing something inappropriate. What sometimes we do not realize is that bullying is not only part of the class, it is also something that happens outside our class, and that was what happened in my case. I had a student who was thirteen; this student was really quiet and shy. In addition to this, she was always distracted and tended to draw in the book instead of answering it, that did not affect her relationship in class with her peers but it did affect the relationship with her classmates outside. When classes ended they always waited in the cyber center, they played videogames while they were waiting for their parents to pick them up; bullying was done while students waited there, as no teachers were there, students tend to insult everybody and mock of something they said or did, my student was the most bullied there. Students did not let her use a computer, and they did not talk to her or let her watch them play, she just sat on the floor and started drawing or something. I knew this was happening when I saw her crying on the floor, she said nobody liked her and everybody insulted her so her parents decided to stop taking her to English classes. Teenagers are in a stage of their lives in which they try to be accepted, and they confuse that acceptance by acting wrong or bullying somebody else. According to Stop Bullying, Harassment, and Anti-Bully in School/Work article (2013) *Bullying Statistics*, this is even more subtle than verbal bullying. Teenage bullying that includes emotional methods aims at getting someone else to feel isolated, alone and may even prompt depression. Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1992) refers to the reasons people present for past successes and failures. Learners who attribute their failure in language learning to their inability to learn will easily become demotivated. Also, when bullying is present students may tend to isolate from the class activities and consequently from their classmates. Working with teenagers does not end when they leave

the classroom, when they are out they act like they really are and we as teachers have to keep an eye on them as much as we can. I was able to realize what was happening outside class and acted accordingly.

6. Saturday Courses

I mentioned before that Harmon Hall offers courses on Saturdays. Saturday courses were really long, each class lasted for 4 hours and we had double shift, one class started at 8:30 in the morning and the other started at 2:00 in the afternoon. I worked both shifts, so I started at 8:30 and finished at 7:00 pm at night, I spent all day long working. The first month it was exhausting I ended really tired but my main concern were the students. A four hours class is really tiring for them and it really affects their motivation to learn, there was a moment in which students could not pay attention or they could not understand what was presented to them. Some students started leaving or stopped attending school because they knew they could go during the week for one hour and make up the five hours they did not attend. What I did in order to avoid this problem was having games in class like hot potato with a ball and bringing movies to watch during their breaks; this helped me a little, the classes were shorter and students did not feel the class was long and boring. The afternoon classes were more difficult to carry out. I arrived at two and by four they were sleepy, tired or hungry; that made the class boring because they did not want to work or speak, they just waited for their break to go out and have lunch. After lunch, they had short working periods and then again, they felt sleepy. In order to avoid students getting bored, I started bringing different activities like board games or puzzles and whenever they felt tired we started playing. As a result, the class was not hard on them. We could also see a movie if the time allowed it. I also allowed the student who participated the most to bring a movie to watch the next Saturday (movies for teens, not horror or gore); with that idea they were always trying to choose the movie to watch and sometimes the class was so fast that we had

extra time for playing games or just talking about something they wanted to share. Tiredness and boredom were not part of my class anymore.

7. Teenagers and young teachers

Being a young teacher had pros and cons, especially with teenagers who cannot differentiate between the teacher and a young person who can still be their friend, that happened to me with a group of teens who became more than students to me.

Teenagers are always testing teachers, by testing I mean that they always do things to see until what point the teacher would scold them or just ignore the situation. I worked with a Saturday teen's course, they were twelve students and they went to class from 2:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon; they were not bad students, they were really active and they liked each other, they were almost a perfect group. I was twenty years old when I taught them, this fact interested them a lot because they used to say "the teacher is just six years older than us" and due to that they started to ask more and more questions about me. At the beginning the questions were just about my age and my likes and dislikes, but soon they started to ask more personal questions and they started to become my friends instead of my students. The simple fact of calling me "Memo" instead of teacher made the things worse, they disrespected me and thought we were friends, but the problem was not theirs, it was mine for not stopping them from the start. These students tried to take my cellphone to watch my pictures, they took it from the desk and started operating it without any permission, as it was blocked they could not see anything but the simple fact of them taking my personal stuff was annoying. Another thing they used to do was searching me on Facebook and sent invitations for me to add them, of course I did not do it but they were so persistent that they continued asking me for it in class. In order to avoid the disrespect in class, I started to correct them when they called me by my first name, I said: "sorry? Teacher what? - That

made them realize that I did not accept the way they called me, they changed that habit soon. Another thing I did was responding them in a serious way when they asked me some personal questions like: “Is that part of the class?” “Is it in the book?” They hated the new teacher but it was not my job to make more friends, and their obligation was not to investigate my personal life.

8. A good group

I mentioned before that many teachers think that working with teenagers could be very difficult but it can sometimes be the best thing for a teacher. I had a group of teens around thirteen and fifteen years old, they were only six but that was not a problem. They worked and contributed in every single class and every single moment. Whenever I assigned an activity they did it without hesitating or complaining, sometimes they gave me opinions to make the activity more dynamic and I accepted as they usually worked really well. The motivation of these particular students was music, they loved listening to *Justin Bieber* and *One Direction* so when they were working in class I used to play some songs from these two and they worked really calm and happy, they even asked me for a karaoke competition and other similar things. Motivation in language learning is a complex situation, as language learning is not only an educational activity, but also involves social cultural issues (Dörnyei, 2001). I tried to motivate these students the most I could; also I pushed them a lot to take advantage of their good mood and their willingness to cooperate in class. When teachers have a good group like this we have to make them be even better than they actually are, in that way we continue helping them to learn.

9. First students to finish the program.

Time passed really fast, I was getting more and more experience and meeting more and more people. Something I would never forget was the graduation of my first group, eight people started and only two of them finished the sixteen courses. When students finished

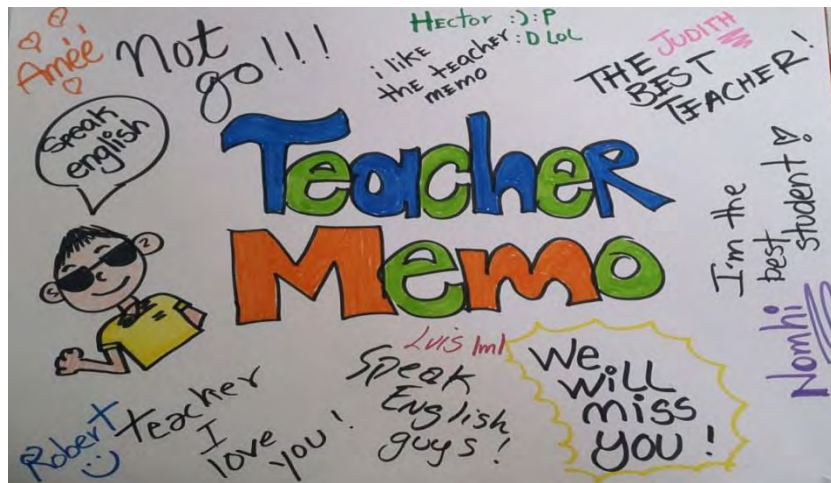
the courses they had to give a speech narrating their experience at Harmon Hall, they gave it and for my surprise they said I was the best teacher they ever had in the school and they would always remember me, that really made me feel I was doing my job properly and it was rewarding. That was the good part of being a teacher; students appreciate your work making you feel whatever you are doing is good for them. I have to say that not all the students finished their program because they left school for different reasons, like money issues or they just found something else to do in the afternoons. I could see how teens of thirteen or fifteen years became young adults, they were going to start university when they left Harmon Hall, and if I compare them from the first time they were in my class, I can affirm they learned well and they are ready to continue learning English or even a third language.

10. Last days at Harmon Hall

I would like to say that when I worked at Harmon Hall I enjoyed more the *Touchstone* courses than the teen's courses, but where I learned more about being a teacher was with the teen's courses. The last days at school, I had a group of teens which I did not get to know really well, the reason for that was that as I was going to leave school I did not do my best effort as I always did, actually these students were not bad but they were quiet and they did not use to talk a lot in class as the rest of my groups. They liked playing hot potato but that was the only thing we did in class. I think I affected their motivation with my apathetic attitude, and that is a problem that many students also have, their teachers are not fun or interesting for them.

The last day they surprised me, they planned a good-bye party for me, they decorated the classroom and they wrote me letters. This was amazing, even when I was really boring and

apathetic they planned the party and it was the best of all the parties, they brought food and we took many pictures of that special day I will never forget.



This is the picture students drew the day I left Harmon Hall, it shows how much my students liked my classes and I still keep this picture, I really like it, that is why I want to share it in this paper.

V. CONCLUSION

This work describes the experience of a student that started working as a teacher at the age of eighteen, a student that had no training at all when he started working, a student that paid his university studies working as an English teacher. I would like to say that working and studying at the same time, gave me the best experience I could ever have and thanks to that I am now a young experienced teacher able to work with different students' levels and people. This work was based on motivation, considered the most important factor in the learning process; not only for me, but for all teachers in different subjects and levels. Motivation is what makes a student learn, if he or she does not have any kind of motivation his or her learning process will not be effective, that is something I could confirm as I worked with different levels and different ages.

We as teachers have to take into consideration our students' needs, Wong Fillmore (1991) emphasize the importance of the native speaker's support to learn so as not to lose the little motivation we could have gained; they are our number one priority, when we plan or even when we want to teach them something, we have to think how we are going to develop the exercises in order to keep their attention; we cannot expect a student to pay complete attention to what we teach if we do not prepare a class beforehand thinking on them. I faced many problems because when I started working, I thought I could teach the same way every level and age, but I was wrong, what worked with a group did not work with the other or what was fun for kids, was not for adults; something obvious became difficult just for doing the same. The difficult part of teaching is what I mentioned before, planning something to make our students feel motivated to learn, it is difficult because students have

different personalities and because of that, they can be comfortable with something we plan, but on the other hand some can dislike our activities.

Another thing we have to consider when trying to motivate students is to find trendy topics for them involving social and cultural issues (Dörnyei, 2001). In my working experience, this was very important because teenagers can feel more identified with the topics taught and they can feel comfortable with them. In my learning process of teaching new things appear, from music to technology, for example; Justin Bieber (singer) was trendy, most kids were talking about him and singing his songs, so we can take this advantage for planning or bringing material that will be attractive, that way their attention would be ours, talking about technology, iphone, ipad and ipod were the “in” things to have, we can use them as topics to discuss, people like to talk about technology and if not, at least they become part of the conversation and get involved. Nowadays, we are living with technology, everything is electronic, students have easier access to the Internet and they know how to use it; we can use technology for two purposes, one is using computers, projectors or ipads to teach, just by simply showing vocabulary in the ipad they will look at us, the other is having students use technology as an extra material for example; they can make power point presentations and project them in class, so they will get involved because they would like to design their own presentations and they would be excited to work on computers.

I expressed before that not all the strategies work for every student, but we can make them be part of whatever we are doing with the rest, for example; if a student does not want to talk about a topic we can make him or her choose another for the next class and make him or her the leader. We have to involve every single student in our classes because that also

affects their motivation; if they do not feel part of the group they simply leave school or start to call our attention by misbehaving or not doing anything.

I explained that the strategies I used were only focused on small groups like the ones I worked with at Harmon Hall. Teachers with larger groups could not have the same results as larger groups do not have the same attention from the teacher and some students do not like the language at all. I think people understand that it is not the same workings with large and small groups, each of them have their pros and cons, so we can change the strategies into something more adequate for large groups like making plays, competitions or projects. Some teens like doing projects in groups and they demonstrate their creativity in a really artistic way.

Being an English teacher is not for everybody, knowledge and performance are not the same, we can have the best knowledge about teaching but if we are not good performers we are just not teachers. I have mentioned in the memory part that the techniques that really worked were learned while teaching teenagers. They were the only ones who really made me force myself to find alternatives to make them feel motivated and eager to learn, and also, I admitted that the personality and students' mood affect motivation but that cannot stop us from having them learn English, as we all know, it is the universal language and they will use it for future matters.

Another thing I would like to add is the part of the teacher-student relationship. Most teachers try to be the friend of their students and that is something that could not be possible if we want our students to learn and respect us. I mentioned that I lost the respect of my students the moment I decided to let them be my friends, and it was really hard to

gain their respect again. We are not their friends and we always confuse being friendly with being their friend. Teenagers love having the teachers as their friends, but the problem is they do not know the moment and the place to be friends and they act rudely and playful with the teacher as they consider him or her a friend. Something I would like to mention is, that we cannot motivate teenagers just by explaining them how important English in their lives will be, they do not care about the future; motivation has to be developed in class and make them feel interested in what we are teaching them without making them feel it is only grammar. We have to find the way to make it an unconscious way of acquiring the language and we are the ones who change their minds about what an English class is, so in conclusion, motivation is not only words, it is continuous action towards students attitude and way of thinking.

I mentioned above that we have to take our students needs into consideration and according to their personality we have to work with them, but we also have to be careful of something really important that we frequently omit and that is bullying. I did not have a significant problem of bullying, but I think that we as teachers are the ones who have to stop this motivation factor. Bullying is the number one factor that affects the motivation of teens, and because of that, they stop going to school and added that we teachers do not stop it on time or we do not even notice there is bullying in class; they dislike the teacher and start being rude and lazy in class. Again, it is our job to look after them if we want them to continue learning; in my case losing a student was a bad thing because the school could not lose students because they represented less money and of course if the classes were not full of students, groups were in danger to be closed.

Finally, I would like to finish this part by expressing something, I would not be the teacher I am right now if I had not started teaching before starting the university, the experience I

have now is something that no one could have even if they work more than I do, and that is, because I learned the process first then the theory. It would be better if there were more schools or institutions that accept students as their workers, we could learn more and better while in practice. We could link the theory to what we are experiencing in real classes and we could actually question the theory. Even though we work for students of different ages we have to understand we have to change methods and modify some theories in order to accomplish our goals and satisfy our students. I learned that teenagers have changed a lot and that they are smarter, but lazier now. Working and teaching gave me the best opportunities to motivate my students as I practiced in class what I learned at the university and in that way I could confirm if what a theory said was actually working or not.

I know these things can change starting from the teacher-to-be, but if we continue with this thinking that we have to wait until we finish working or that there is nothing else to study more and more low level teachers will be the ones teaching our kids and there will be little, if not, no progress. Even worse, future teachers will not be able to motivate these future citizens who will be our future doctors and governors and teaching English will be more difficult than it is today. Working and studying seems really hard but I am the prove that you can do both, of course there were moments in which I was about to drop any of the two, but with perseverance and support from my family I continued and finished my studies with the rest of the people that started with me in the major.

I would like to mention some of the things that helped me as a student and as a teacher during my studies at the University of Quintana Roo. I mentioned before that I worked and studied at the same time, which for me was perfect because I could learn both, theory and practice at the same time, and I could put into practice what I learned in my classes at the university.

I can affirm that a person can learn better and faster putting into practice all the things they learn at school, for example, I learned about the board use, I had the notes and material explaining how to use the board properly, but, how long will a teacher put into practice all that information? We learned it in eight semester, almost ready to finish, that means we had one year more of studying and if we were lucky another year to find a job, in few words students have to wait two years to start putting into practice something learned at the university; in my case, I put almost everything into practice a few hours later when I finished my classes and went to teach. My point here is we learn a lot of useful information, we take tests and we have grades proving we know the information given, but we do not really know how good we are going to be applying them, we cannot know if they will or will not work with our students or we will not remember what to do the moment we stand in front of a class eager to learn.

Motivation, the main topic of this work, also played important part in my performance as a teacher. At the university we were young adults, we were there to learn and to get as much information as possible but sometimes we felt demotivated, sometimes we as students expect something completely different from what we get, I mean, we want to have a dynamic class and it was not. That made me realize that some people, especially teenagers do not want to have a class with books only, they want to move, to see real things in class, and they want dynamic classes. The things that students do not like in their classes are the things that, the moment they become teachers, definitely change in order to not continue with the same pattern. Furthermore, I also took amazing positive things from my professors to my students like ways of handling readings or interesting anecdotes I shared with my teenagers; basically I took positive and negative things to my classes in order to learn, and I used everything I could to see if it worked or not with my students. We all know everything

is going to change in education, like the use of technology now, but that does not mean we forget the basic theories.

I recommend every future teacher to try everything we learn in classes, something that did not work for us can work for our students and they could feel satisfied with our work.

Last thing I would like to add is, people who do not know what to study it is better not to choose this career, the reason is simple, we are the ones who educate people and make them learn something new, if we work with kids, we are examples of what good manners and values are and if we just barely teach them and show them we do not like what we are doing, we just jeopardize their learning and worst of all, we make them hate something they could love and be the best on. I gave some other reasons of this point, but I just want to add that motivation is related to this concern because if my teacher does not motivate me in class, I would not like to be his or her student anymore; and what we could do instead of choosing a career just because is, ordering our thoughts and deciding cool-minded what we really want to study for.

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Appendix 1

These are the books I used in the Pre-teens courses, each one is made up of eight units and in each course students finish two units, so each book is used for four courses only.



Adults courses, each book has twelve units; in each course students finish three units, so each book lasted for four courses.



Kid's box program, twelve units, in each course students finish three units so the book lasted for four courses only.

