Exploring the Emotional Well-being of Spanish Students: The Impact of Online Learning on Motivation

Explorando el bienestar emocional de los estudiantes de español: el impacto del aprendizaje en línea en la motivación

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the impact of online versus in-person learning environments on the motivation of beginning-level Spanish students. Using a modified Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), data were collected from 18 students enrolled in a 15-week Basic Spanish Skills course. Quantitative analysis revealed a clear preference for in-person classes, with students reporting greater enjoyment, engagement, and motivation compared to online sessions, which were described as less stimulating and less enjoyable. The teacher's role in fostering a supportive, engaging classroom environment was found to significantly enhance student motivation. These findings underscore the importance of addressing emotional and motivational challenges in online education to promote equitable and effective learning experiences.

Keywords: online learning, motivation, L2 learning, SFL

RESUMEN
Este estudio investiga el impacto de los entornos de aprendizaje en línea frente a los presenciales en la motivación del alumnado de una clase de español. Utilizando una versión modificada del Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), se recopilaron datos de 18 estudiantes inscritos en un curso de español para principiantes de 15 semanas. El análisis cuantitativo reveló una clara preferencia por las clases presenciales, con el estudiantado informando mayor disfrute, participación y motivación en comparación con las sesiones en línea, que muchos describieron como menos estimulantes y agradables. El papel del profesorado en la creación de un entorno de aula de apoyo y motivador resultó ser clave para aumentar la motivación de los estudiantes. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de abordar los desafíos emocionales y motivacionales en la educación en línea para promover experiencias de aprendizaje equitativas y efectivas.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje en línea, motivación, aprendizaje de segundas lenguas, SFL

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of technology to enhance learning is gaining ground worldwide, reducing the temporal and spatial problems associated with in-person learning. Although distance learning has been around for a long time, since 2020 and in response to the situation created by the COVID-19 virus, different platforms have been used for the classes to be carried out virtually. During the pandemic, language course instructors found in these tools a great help to continue teaching from home, which in addition to allowing students to keep up with their education with certain normality, also adapted well in terms of communication between students and teachers. Courses continue to be delivered online even after the pandemic, and introducing students to online platforms has and continues to be a challenging task. How online learning affects students remains an important area of research that ought to be addressed.

In order to understand what the word "online" encompasses in terms of teaching it is important to understand the differences in the terminology that is used to describe the use of technology in the classroom. Bates (2005) pointed out that the terms "online learning" and "e-learning" are used interchangeably but made the distinction that "e-learning" can encompass any form of technology, such as digital whiteboards, offline software or mobile apps that function without Internet access, whereas "online learning" refers specifically to using the Internet in the educational process, as is the case with virtual classrooms carried out in platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. It can be said that "online learning" has its roots in distance education, since the Internet is necessary to sustain lessons. In this way, the term "fully online" is used by Bates (2005, p. 9) to distinguish distance courses where students must have access to an Internet device to be able to undertake the entire course. There are many definitions of "online learning," reflecting the wide diversity in terms of the practices and technologies that are in use regarding the Internet. Ally (2008) defined it in the following way:

> the use of the Internet to access materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience (Ally, 2008, p. 7).

In this article, the term "online learning" will be used to encompass the definition offered by Ally while incorporating the distinction used by Bates. Therefore, online learning is taken to be a form of distance education mediated by technological tools where learners are geographically separated from their institution.

Many authors have reiterated the potential benefits of online learning. Plaisance (2018) explained that this mode of instruction could be delivered synchronously or asynchronously. The synchronous mode enables real-time communication between teachers and learners (Plaisance, 2018) through applications such as Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. This context has been specifically relevant in terms of language learning, which requires dedication in terms of time. Online learning allows learners to learn a second language (L2) in a virtual environment at their own pace and time (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016) especially in the context of the asynchronous mode. Many seemed to find the asynchronous online classroom very useful, mainly due to the flexibility that it offers.

However, virtual lessons have also proven problematic for different reasons. Mondol and Mohiuddin's (2020) study concerning online learning during the pandemic in Bangladesh reported that their participants faced various learning difficulties, mainly because of weak Internet connectivity at home and the unavailability of supporting devices. The teaching-learning process being interrupted by these difficulties resulted in a motivation swing that aroused anxiety symptoms in students. Furthermore, teachers' limited ability to check learners' understanding through visual signs even in a synchronous mode of instruction can lead to learners' misconceptions being prolonged, unless they independently study further or are willing to ask questions in class (Plaisance, 2018). Hence, unless carried out mindfully, online learning could lead to possible learners' disconnection and disengagement (Plaisance, 2018).

Some studies regarding students' attitudes towards online learning during the pandemic have proven that student's feelings towards education are indeed affected by the online context (e.g., Coman et al., 2020; Evişen et al., 2020). According to the previously mentioned studies, affective factors seem to be the main aspects affected by the mode of instruction. Emotionally driven agents, such as motivation, have generated a considerable amount of research and used to be a focus of interest even before the pandemic started.

Motivation, in simple terms, is the stimulus that pushes students to initiate and sustain the L2 process (Dörnyei, 2005). In practice, teachers and learners normally use motivation to explain "what causes success and failure in learning" (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, p.55). Motivation can influence what we learn, how we learn and when we choose to learn (Schunk & Usher, 2012). Spolsky (1990) affirms that motivated students are likely to learn more information more quickly than students who are less motivated, as well as to participate actively and pay more attention to tasks or activities. Consequently, many researchers have been concerned with the question of how to increase motivation in the classroom, with considerable research dedicated to L2 acquisition and its relationship with motivation itself and with the implementation of several motivational techniques, most of them signaling a positive correlation with learning (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

Given the important and reciprocal relationship between motivation and learning, this affective factor has been actively researched across a wide range of traditional educational settings (Schunk et al., 2014). However, studies that explore motivation in an online context are rather limited in number and scope, and even less in the context of L2 online learning, even though physical condition has been long considered a factor that affects learner's motivation (Harmer, 1991). What is noticeable is that higher dropout rates are associated with online courses compared with face-to-face ones (Park & Choi, 2009), with poor motivation as a decisive factor contributing to this. These results point to the need to reconsider motivation in online learning contexts as an important factor to study.

As has been mentioned before, how motivation might affect education has been given attention to for decades. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led many around the world to use online platforms to continue with education, and some have maintained online learning even as pandemic-related restrictions have disappeared. Many institutions are still coping with online classes nowadays, and how the virtual situation affects motivation is an area that has received little attention so far, specifically when concerning ISLA. Therefore, this project aims to examine how motivation is affected by the online language teaching context.

This study will add to previous literature in one primary way: it will collect students' perceptions in an L2 classroom, adding information to research on affective factors in language learning online settings.

2. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to explore the motivation of students a in Spanish as a foreign language class. More specifically, the present study examines whether there are any differences in students' experience of motivation in the online synchronous versus the in-person setting. The following research questions were created to address these issues.

1. Do students experience less motivation during online synchronous language classes than in the in-person setting?

2. What factors do students identify with motivation?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on motivation and online learning has produced diverse results, but in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) it consistently highlights the central role of the teacher, the learning environment, and the opportunities for interaction. An early study (Ushida, 2005) showed that in L2 online courses, students tended to have relatively high anxiety levels at the beginning of the semester due to their lack of familiarity with the online learning environment, but their levels of motivation were relatively positive and stable during the course. Findings also show that teacher attitudes can shape a unique class culture that can indeed affect students' motivation towards studying the L2 in the online context, which reinforces the critical role of the teacher in online education. Moreover, the author concluded that some students could benefit from the flexibility of the online course, while at the same time not all students learn how to manage their own learning when online, and this can create low levels of motivation.

The theoretical framework of *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) has been widely applied to online contexts. SDT argues that all humans have an intrinsic need to be self-determining or autonomous, as well as competent and connected to their environment. SDT focuses primarily on internal sources of motivation such as a need to gain knowledge or independence. According to this theory, people need to feel the following to achieve psychological growth: *autonomy* (people need to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals)*, competence* (people need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills) and *connection or relatedness* (people need to experience a sense of belonging). In SLA, these needs are especially relevant, since motivation is closely tied to learner's sense of agency using the L2 as well as their connection with peers and instructors. For example, Xie et al. (2006) demonstrated that perceived autonomy, instructor guidance, and feedback were critical to online students' motivation.

Comparisons between online and face-to-face instruction (Mullen & Tallent-Runnels, 2006) revealed that students perceived classroom environments and instructors' support and

demands differently. This finding reinforces the notion that motivation theories developed for traditional SLA settings cannot simply be transferred to online settings, because the characteristics of the learning environment, such as flexibility, accessibility,

CMC (Computer Mediated Communication), and the dynamics of student differ considerably.

Several studies have examined how online learners' motivation may be shaped by interactional opportunities with both peers and instructor. While some research found that online students can exhibit higher intrinsic motivation than their face-to-face peers (Wighting et al., 2008), others highlighted that the lack of in-person interaction was a motivational drawback (Knowles & Kerkman, 2007). Later work emphasized the importance of teacher enthusiasm and warmth as a central driver for motivation in the online context (Selvi, 2010). In SLA-specific research, Dimas (2024) found that learners in a flipped Spanish course manifested a clear preference for the teacher explicitly explaining grammar concepts in the in-person classroom, pointing to the lack of teacher clarification when using the e-learning materials as a detrimental for their language learning experience. Lastly, research focused on instructional activities in the SLA online classroom (Yoshida et al., 2014) has pointed to the need to create authentic, meaningful, culturally and task-based interaction to enhance students' intrinsic motivation.

Researchers have also turned their attention to motivation in the online learning environment since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly due to the impact that the shift to online instruction seemed to have on students. While most studies suggested stable or even slightly increased motivation when students found online tasks engaging (Pasion et al., 2020; Konecki, 2020), others reported that online education had an impact on students' motivation, especially when students perceived a lack of opportunities for authentic interaction. Research on self-directed learning (SDL) also gained importance, since L2 learners were required to assume greater autonomy in online classes (Subekti, 2021). Others noted that motivation tended to decline over time due to reduced social interaction and a weaker sense of community (Ozer & Badem, 2022; Esra & Sevilen, 2021). Teacher perspectives highlighted both the potential and limitations of distance education for motivating L2 learners, with challenges such as connectivity, workload, and reduced human interaction (Aldossary & Altalhab, 2022).

However, some studies also found that there was a positive effect of interaction through the electronic platform on students' motivation to learn during the pandemic. Almaleki et al. (2022) pointed to the fact that learning through the electronic platform allowed students to use their skills and interests usefully, and that it was more "attractive and more enjoyable for them" (Almaleki et al., 2021, p.10) than face-to-face classes. Case studies (Xhaferi & Xhaferri, 2022) reported that EFL students remained more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically, provided that teachers supported interaction through quizzes, discussions and presentations. Some studies even found that online classes reduced anxiety, influencing motivation positively (Jiang et al., 2023).

More recent research has expanded motivational constructs in SLA online contexts. Sun & Mu (2023) demonstrated that learners' ideal self (the learner's vision of themselves as successful L2 users in the future) and L2 grit (persistence and sustained effort to learn the language), which are considered significant motivation drivers, predicted satisfaction in

online English learning, with self-efficacy (a student's belief in their own ability to successfully carry out a task) mediating this relationship. Other studies have emphasized the role of gamification (borrowing the mechanics of games for educational activities) in increasing online language learners' motivation and outcomes (Shen et al., 2024). Recent studies continue to underline the significance of teacher-student relationships and interactive methodologies as well. For example, flipped learning approaches in online English language teaching (Ünal et al., 2024) have been associated with increased motivation and satisfaction, while strong teacher-student relationships have been shown to enhance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in virtual environments (Akram & Li, 2024). However, research also stresses that motivation is highly contextual and multifaceted (Hartnett et al., 2011), and therefore online and face-to-face SLA contexts cannot be treated the same.

Given the substantial number of students who have been and still are engaged in online or remote language learning, it is important to consider how motivation in this context is related to the learning experience. While research on SLA in the online language classroom is abundant, the same cannot be said about research on motivation in the online setting, which is rather scarce. Moreover, the research that has been conducted in SLA about online learning during the pandemic is also limited, and that conducted prior to the pandemic seems to center on learners who elected to take their language courses online. During the pandemic, many students have been forced into remote learning, and their experience of low motivation may have originated from a lack of agency in the selection of their learning environment. Therefore, results of new research may vary, as the online setting has become a choice again. Due to these factors, more research is needed to determine how affective factors are influenced by the context in which education takes place, which will be the focus of the present study.

4. METHODS

4.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 18 L2 Spanish students in a medium-size public university in the United States, 10 female and 8 male students. The students were enrolled in a beginning-level Spanish as a foreign language course that was primarily taught in-person, but that also had an online synchronous component. Many of the students were taking the course to fulfill a language requirement, not because they were planning to major or minor in Spanish or studying the language for personal reasons.

4.2. Teaching context

The Basic Spanish Skills course of the present study is the first introductory course for beginning students of Spanish at this university. Students who enroll in this four-credit hour course are not expected to have prior knowledge of the language. The course is delivered in fifty-minute lessons, four days a week during one semester. Students learn Spanish for a total of fifteen weeks (60 hours per term). During the first week of the semester, four hours of instruction were obligatorily taught in the online synchronous format using the video-conferencing platform Zoom due to measures taken by the university to prevent the

spread of COVID-19 at the time when the number of cases were high in the local community. Moreover, for the purpose of the present study, a total of eight classes during two consecutive weeks towards the middle of the semester were also taught in the online synchronous format using the video-conferencing platform Zoom. Hence, a total of three weeks of the 15-week course or 20% were taught synchronously online, while the other 80% of the class sessions were taught in person. It is important to mention that the classes that took place online for the purpose of current research were recorded, and students were aware of this fact.

This course was taught through *Contraseña*, an online platform where students are presented with all the learning resources necessary for the course. Students were expected to be able to convey basic personal meaning and engage in very simple conversations about personal or daily topics. The emphasis of this course was to develop oral skills in Spanish. Therefore, exposure to meaningful input and encouraging output exchange between students was considered of central importance. This "flipped classroom" approach was maintained during the three weeks of online teaching created for the current study.

4.3. Data collection procedures

The approach taken in this study is quantitative. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire online through the platform Qualtrics, a web-based survey platform where questionnaires can be created and shared and the data collected can be statistically analyzed. The survey was administered towards the middle of the semester, immediately after the online synchronous instruction had concluded. Participants were given time in class to fill out the questionnaires and could take as much time as they needed to complete them. In addition, when answering the questionnaires, participants were asked to think specifically about the three weeks of the course that were taught in the synchronous online format when they responded to the questions querying them about motivation in the online setting, and to think about the rest of the course when answering the questions related to the in-person setting.

To measure motivation, students answered a questionnaire adapted by the researcher from the *Attitude/Motivation Test Battery* (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985). The AMBT is still considered the only published standardized test of foreign or second language learning motivation. The original questionnaire includes a total of 104 items. In each case, individuals are presented with the item followed by the seven alternatives: strongly agree, moderately agree, slightly agree, neutral, slightly disagree, moderately disagree, strongly disagree. Higher scores on each statement correspond to greater agreement with each statement. The original AMTB had a maximum score of 70 and a minimum score of 0. A higher score indicated higher levels of motivation. The original AMTB explores language learning in six main areas: Integrativeness, Attitude Toward Learning Situation, Motivation, Language Anxiety, Parental Encouragement, and Instrumental Orientation. These variables can be divided in several sub-variables: attitudes towards socio-cultural background, interests in foreign languages, attitudes towards learning the specific language, motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, teacher evaluation, teacher inspiration, teacher competence, teacher rapport, course difficulty, course utility and course interest.

The first part of the questionnaire aimed to collect students' desires, attitudes, and motivation in a more general fashion. Its goal was to collect information to understand student's feelings about a number of items prior to a more in-depth survey regarding specific factors related to motivation. It is composed of six statements and a scale of 0 to 100 that the students had to rate. Depending on the item, the scale fluctuates between labels: very low (0) –very high (100), weak (0)– strong (100), or unfavorable (0)–favorable (100).

The second part of the questionnaire was concerned with student's feelings regarding their Spanish course. This part of the questionnaire is used to gather knowledge on more specific motivational aspects that were present or absent in the Spanish course depending on the mode of the course, and focuses on motivational intensity, desire to learn Spanish, attitudes towards learning Spanish and attitudes towards the teacher and curriculum. Students were asked to select an option for each statement according to the amount of agreement or disagreement with that item, in a scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Since the present study aimed to investigate motivation in relation to the context in which the L2 teaching takes place, items regarding integrativeness, instrumental orientation, and parental encouragement were not included in the instrument used in this study. Only those items that referred to factors that are subject to the educational setting were considered useful, and therefore only four major sections were maintained in the adapted AMTB employed in this study: Motivational Intensity (i.e., how much effort people reportedly expend in learning the language), Desire to Learn Spanish (i.e., how much enjoyment people report feeling when they learn the language), Attitudes Towards Learning Spanish (i.e., how much personal investment in succeeding in the language people claim for themselves) and Attitudes Towards the Teacher (i.e., how much the role of the teacher affects the student's learning experience). The instrument adapted for the present study consists of 32 items with the same seven response options in the original AMBT to determine students' level of agreement with each item statement. Additionally, the questionnaire items were modified to focus on Spanish as the target language and the setting where students learn, including both face-to-face and online instruction. The language of the items was also simplified to make them more meaningful and contextually relevant for the participants.

4.4. Data analysis procedures

The answers were analyzed quantitatively to determine if students reported experiencing less motivation during the online class sessions than in the in-person sessions. Some of the items of the questionnaire were comparative, targeting specific features and asking about them in both settings, online and face-to-face. The researcher compared the percentages of the participants who agreed or disagreed with these comparative items to determine which setting was less motivating and what factors they identified as motivating or demotivating in each setting.

5. RESULTS

The results from the first section of the motivation questionnaire, which focuses on students' desires and attitudes more generally, are shown in Table 1. The highest score was given to

the attitude towards the teacher, which the students situated at 97.88 out of 100, meaning that the students expressed a considerably positive view of the teacher. Although not negative, the lowest scores were given to interest in learning a foreign language in general, situated at 65.29 in the scale, and their desire to learn the Spanish language specifically, positioned at 65.59. However, attitudes were somewhat higher in favorability than desire, since their attitude towards learning the Spanish language was placed at 74.29, and their attitude towards the Spanish course at 75.71.

My interest in foreign languages is	65.29
My desire to learn Spanish is	65.29
My attitude toward learning Spanish is	74.29
My attitude toward my Spanish teacher is	97.88
My attitude toward my Spanish course is	75.71
My motivation to learn Spanish is	68.94

Table 1. First part of motivation questionnaire

As described above, the second part of the questionnaire is concerned with students' feelings regarding their Spanish course. The results of the responses to this portion of the questionnaire are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 below. As shown in Table 3, questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 25 of the motivation questionnaire were used to gather data about students' level of motivation in the physical classroom. In contrast, questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 16, 18, 10, 22, 24, and 26 asked students about their motivation in the online language class, as shown in Table 4. For the sake of presentation, the categories were collapsed into "Agree" and "Disagree".

Questions	Agree	Disagree
1. I have a strong desire to go to my in-person Spanish class.	88.24%	11.76%
3. I feel like the Spanish class is really a waste of time.	11.76%	88.24%
5. Studying Spanish is not enjoyable.	11.76%	88.24%
7. I don´t think my Spanish teacher is very good.	0%	100%
9. I would rather spend more time in the online Spanish class instead of in-person.	26.41%	73.59%
10. I think my Spanish class is boring.	5.88%	94.12%
12. I enjoy the activities of our Spanish class much more in-person than online.	76.47%	23.53%
14. My Spanish teacher has a more dynamic and interesting teaching style when in-person.	100%	0%
17. When I have a problem understanding something in my Spanish class, I prefer being in-person to ask my teacher for help.	94.12%	5.88%
19. I think that learning Spanish is dull.	5.88%	94.12%
21. I look forward to the time I spend in Spanish in-person class.	88.24%	11.76%
23. I have a hard time thinking of anything positive about my Spanish class.	0%	100%
25. Spanish is one of my favorite in-person courses.	95.12%	5.88%

Table 2. Motivation in the in-person classroom

Questions	Agree	Disagree
2. I have a strong desire to go to my online Spanish class.	58.83%	41.17%

4. I feel like the Spanish class online is really a waste of time.	23.53%	76,47%
6. Studying Spanish online is not enjoyable.	41.49%	58.81%
8. I don't think my Spanish teacher is very good when the class is online.	0%	100%
9. I would rather spend more time in the online Spanish class instead of in-person.	26.41%	73.59%
11. I think my Spanish class online is boring.	41.17%	58,83%
13. I enjoy the activities of our Spanish class much more online than in-person.	23.53%	76.47%
15. My Spanish teacher has a more dynamic and interesting teaching style when online.	35.59%	64.71%
16. When I have a problem understanding something in my Spanish class, I prefer the online version to ask my teacher for help.	23.53%	76.47%
18. Being online has made me lose desire to know Spanish.	35.29%	64.71%
19. I think that learning Spanish online is dull.	47.06%	52.95%
22. I look forward to the time I spend in Spanish online class.	41.17%	58.83%
24. I have a hard time thinking of anything positive about my online Spanish class.	17.64%	82.36%
26.Spanish is one of my favorite online courses.	52.95%	47.05%

Table 3. Motivation in the online classroom

The results of this second part of the questionnaire indicate a clear distinction between the levels of motivation in the in-person classroom and in the online course. Students indicated a stronger desire to attend in-person classes (88.23%) in comparison to attending the online sessions (58.83%). The majority of students (73.59%) did not agree with the item: "I would rather spend more time in the online Spanish class instead of in-person", and a similarly high percentage agreed that they enjoyed the activities of the Spanish class much more in-person than online (76.47%). More than half of the participants (64.71%) asserted that being online made them lose desire to learn Spanish. When asked about their attitude regarding attending the class, 88.24% of the students looked forward to the time they spend in the Spanish in-person course. However, this percentage dropped substantially when asked about the online setting, when only 41.17% agreed with the fact that they looked forward to going to class. 47.06% of the participants thought that learning in the online setting was dull, which is a high percentage compared to those who considered that learning Spanish in-person was dull, only 5.88%. When asked about the instructor, all students thought that the Spanish teacher had a more dynamic and interesting teaching style when in-person. In the same way, not one of the 18 participants of the study thought that learning Spanish was boring, but when asked about learning Spanish online, 41.17% thought it was. Another feature that was considered in previous research as having an influence on students' motivation is asking the instructor for help. The great majority of participants (94.12%) preferred being physically in front of the teacher to ask questions when they did not understand something in Spanish. Finally, 95.12% of students agreed that Spanish was one of their favorite in-person courses, a percentage that dropped when they were asked the same question but about the online class, an item with which 52.95% of students agreed.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the features of the online lessons decreased students' motivation, affecting their attitudes towards the teacher, their interest in the course and learning activities, and their desire to attend the lessons.

6. DISCUSSION

The discussion of results will address the two research questions of this study: (Q1) whether students experience less motivation in online synchronous language classes compared to in-person, and (Q2) what factors students associate with motivation.

According to previous literature on motivation and online learning, students' attitudes towards the course can be affected by the mode of instruction. Some researchers have found a positive impact of the online setting on student's motivation, (Almaleki et al. 2021; Konecki, 2020) while some others have found a detrimental effect (Aldossari & Altaihab, 2022; Esra & Sevilen, 2021; Ozer & Badem, 2022). The current study has found several factors of the online classes that have negatively impacted the motivation of the participants.

When analyzing motivation in the online setting, the role of the teacher has been found to be pivotal. Consistent with previous research such as Ushida (2005) and Selvi (2010), responses to the items related to "Teacher Competence" in the motivation questionnaire showed a positive attitude towards the instructor. Since the totality of students disagreed with the item "I don´t think my Spanish teacher is very good when the class is online", it could be said that instructor evaluation was positive. However, a 100% of the participants also agreed that the teacher had a more dynamic and interesting teaching style when the class took place in-person, which pointed to the instructor´s competence online as a source of demotivation for the students.

Previous researchers, such as Mullen and Tallent-Runnels (2006), Aldossari and Altaihab (2022) and Esra and Sevilen (2022) identified boredom as a potential problem for maintaining online students' motivation, mentioning the need for enjoyment to sustain self-determination. This perspective aligns with the current study, since a sizable number of students (47.17%) thought that learning Spanish online was boring or dull, a high number when compared to the same question asked about the in-person class, to which only 5.88% agreed. In this sense, it can be said that the online context affects course evaluation. However, only a 23.53% of the students in this study believed the Spanish online class was a waste of time, indicating that, even though it might be less motivating than in-person, the course material was still found relevant for their education.

Even though research has indicated that the online context affects students' perceptions of the course, their desire to attend class does not seem to be affected by the online context. While previous research has sometimes reported consistent or even higher motivation in online contexts (Aldossari & Altaihab, 2022; Muslimin & Harintana, 2020), the results of the current study were not in line with previous findings. 73.59% of the students would have preferred to spend more time in in-person classes. Moreover, a considerable difference was found in the level of desire to attend the Spanish class: 83% presented a strong desire to

be present in the online sessions, while 88.23% reported a strong interest to attend class when it was held in-person.

Some distance education instructors are concerned about involving various interesting teaching and learning materials, precisely with the purpose of engaging students. Previous research has emphasized that visually attractive materials sustain motivation online (Aldossari & Altalhab's, 2022; Konecki, 2020; Almaleki et al., 2021). Having this in mind, the results of the present study might point to the lack of rich online activities during the online sessions, since 76.47% of participants agreed that they enjoyed the Spanish learning activities much more when they took place in-person.

Communication in the online classroom can be disturbed by the lack of face-to-face interaction (Kaisar & Chowdhury, 2020; Valizadeh, 2021). This can be considered a crucial factor when it affects the interaction between teacher and student, especially when a problem arises. However, previous research has not found the online context to be a problematic environment to ask for help (Aldossari & Altaihab, 2022; Esra & Sevilen, 2022). However, results of the current study show that 94.12% of students preferred being in-person to ask the teacher for help when they have issues, while only 23.53% preferred the online setting, aligning with the results of previous studies and showing that the in-person setting is considered less threatening for students to present their problems to the instructor.

Preferences for the in-person mode of instruction seem to be consistent across research (Aldossari & Altalhab, 2022; Bataineh & Mayyas, 2017) In the present study, a clear preference towards the in-person lessons can be identified. 95.12% of the participants thought that Spanish was one of their favorite in-person courses, while this percentage decreased when asked about the online version, with only 52.95% of the participants in favor. Overall, the findings point to a decline in motivation during online sessions, with 35.29% of students reporting a loss of desire to learn Spanish due to the shift to online classes, which indicates a clear decrease in motivation brought by the virtual lessons and a preference toward the face-to-face educational context.

Taken together, the results of this study underscore the centrality of the teacher's role, the need for engaging instructional materials, and the pivotal importance of face-to-face interaction to sustain student motivation when learning a foreign language.

7. LIMITATIONS

The main aim of the present study was to assess the factors that affect the motivation of students in a hybrid Spanish as a second language university course. Certain limitations were identified.

First, the sample size was very limited (n=18). This restricts the generalizability of the results. However, the study can be regarded as a pilot, needing future research with larger samples to achieve more significant findings. In addition, it is worth noting that the participants of this study did not choose to take the Spanish course freely, since it was a degree requirement. This fact limits the applicability of the findings to other contexts. The course itself was also originally designed as an in-person class, and only three weeks were taught online. Students were not aware of this when enrolling, which may have influenced

their levels of motivation. Moreover, not all students attended the same number of sessions during the online period, and this different exposure to the hybrid mode may have varied their motivation as well.

Another limitation is related to the role of the researcher as both teacher and investigator, which may have influenced students' responses due to possible concerns about their grades and relationship with the instructor. Furthermore, other variables such as gender, which were not included in the study, might have affected the results as well.

The design of the questionnaire also presents limitations. The fact that the questionnaire was adapted from several sources without testing for reliability means that the validity of the results is uncertain compared to standardized tools. Moreover, the absence of open-ended questions or interviews with participants limits the depth of the insights that could be obtained. Finally, the grouping of seven alternatives into two categories when presenting the results might have reduced the precision of the instrument.

Finally, including teachers' perspectives could enrich future studies. In this case, the opinions of instructors reported in previous research were useful in interpreting results. Gathering data directly from teachers would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing motivation in hybrid language learning contexts.

8.   CONCLUSION

Online instruction brings with it numerous alterations in education. This research gathers some of the main factors affecting the motivation of language students enrolled in a Spanish for beginners' course at university level students' motivation and the factors affecting it were analyzed. Motivation was also impacted by the online mode of instruction, since students reported being less motivated in that context than in the in-person setting.

This study has highlighted the relevance of the role of the teacher in online instruction. Many participants agreed that the teacher did not present an interesting or dynamic style when compared to the in-person lessons. Some others thought that learning Spanish online was more boring or dull than in-person and reported losing desire to learn Spanish due to the incorporation of online lessons in the course. For these reasons, the creation of attractive, interactive, and visually appealing learning materials should be considered a priority for online instructors.

Moreover, the in-person setting was selected by participants in the study as the more suitable environment to ask the instructor for help in case of misunderstanding. Many students might decide to remain silent when a question arises in the online setting. In order to prevent students from hesitating to ask questions, it would be advisable for instructors to provide more time for queries before and after each online activity, or to emphasize the availability of office hours for those students who might not venture to ask their questions directly during class time. Enabling students to work on instructional activities in pairs or small groups can also be a solution for this issue. Students might be less hesitant to ask for the instructor's help in front of a smaller number of people. Lastly, dedicating a brief section

at the end of the class period for questions or can be a solution for those who might want to ask for help without interrupting the pace of the lesson.

With these improvements, a healthy environment in which a full learning process can be forged would be achieved. By prioritizing motivational strategies and addressing the diverse needs of learners, educators can inspire a genuine passion for language learning. This would not only enhance academic outcomes but also equip individuals with the cultural and communicative skills necessary to thrive in an interconnected world.

9.   PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Results found in the present study contribute to the understanding of how online second language instruction can affect motivation in students. It can inform instructors and course designers in terms of practical implications, which will be discussed below.
First, this study highlights the relevance of the teacher's role in online instruction. Students perceived the teacher's style as more dynamic and engaging in person, suggesting that teacher presence and delivery of the class need to be carefully adapted for the online environment. Institutions should provide training and support for instructors in the use of digital tools and multimedia resources which can replicate the immediacy and energy of the physical classroom.

Second, students' desire to learn Spanish was significantly lower than their positive attitudes towards the teacher or the course. While the relationship between teachers and students is a key motivational driver, it has proven to be insufficient to sustain motivation. Teachers should design tasks that connect the language to the student, for example through culturally rich content. Online learning should be reimagined to take advantage of unique affordances such as collaborative writing tools, gamified tasks, or virtual exchanges rather than be treated as an inferior version of face-to-face instruction.

Third, students' selected in-person settings as more suitable to ask the instructor for help in case of misunderstanding. Instructors should provide more time for queries before and after each online activity and enable students to work on instructional activities in pairs or small groups. Additionally, offering anonymous channels (e.g., Google Forms, Mentimeter, Kahoot) might help hesitant students.

Taken together, these findings emphasize the pivotal role of the teacher, the importance of interactive and student-centered tasks, and the necessity of addressing affective factors in online language learning. By adapting pedagogical strategies to sustain motivation, instructors can create a more engaging and supportive environment for students.

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