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SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL VARIABLES

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Abstract:

Learning a second language is becoming more and more important nowadays.

The aim of this Master's Thesis is to review and highlight the main factors affecting second language acquisition in the foreign language classroom such as motivation, attitude, personality, learning strategies, social factors and the role of parents. Research has been conducted on external and internal variables, emphasizing the role that that motivation plays in second language acquisition.

Key words: foreign language, second language acquisition, affective variables.

1. Introduction

Today's world is more and more globalized: we interact with other cultures in a way we have never done before, the world is getting smaller, we are citizens of everywhere. The importance of learning a second language is obvious. Learning a second language becomes an indispensable tool to be part of the global economy, to communicate across cultures, to run a business; in the end, to feel that you are an active component of the globalized world.

There is another reason that supports second language learning: it stimulates creativity. When you know a new language, you feel connected with another culture, you can see that there are different ways of looking at and interpreting the same thing, and

you appreciate the diversity of human society. Culture influences us, it influences the way we behave, the way we interact with other people, the way we solve problems and conflicts. Equally important are the values which are connected to culture. Every culture has different values, although oftentimes we are not aware of this until we get in touch with another culture.

It is important to be connected to the world and, in this sense, the need of learning a second language is vital. Languages not only give us the ability to communicate with another culture, but also empower us to understand various points of view.

Pinker (1994) describes language as “the core of what it means to be human and explains language processing as the main manner by which we can know about other peoples”.

In any language learning process there are some factors that affect the process of learning. There are pedagogical factors related to the teacher, methodology and the context of learning and factors related to the learners; in particular, individual factors related to linguistic aptitudes of the student, psychosocial factors related to learners' personality and social factors, just as the socio-economical context is important also.

There are many variables affecting second language acquisition that have been included in different classifications. There are pedagogical factors related to the teacher,

the methodology and the teaching context (Espí & Azurmendi, 1996), as well as variables related to the student: individual, regarding the linguistic attitude of the student, and psychosocial, regarding personality features (Gardner, 1985). Socio-demographic variables are also relevant. The relation between social class and success in second language learning has been studied, and apparently students with the highest socio-economic backgrounds perform higher in the learning process (Muñoz, 2001).

From the point of view of a teacher I am aware of the importance of dealing with the necessities of all the students. Every student is different and unique, and is influenced by different factors (motivation, age, gender, or economical aspects among others) and interests. All of these elements determine the way a person acquires a second language.

Research on this issue shows the complexity of the learning process and emphasizes the factors that affect the learning of a second language.

As teachers, we have tried to cope with the problems that may arise when teaching a second language; we try to understand our students as well as their difficulties problems in the learning process. Awareness of the possible factors affecting the learning process may also be useful for students. Taking these factors into account, we may design a more effective approach to help our students in their learning process.

2. Factors affecting second language learning

The acquisition of a second language has been a subject of investigation for many decades. Research indicates that the acquisition of a second language follows a different process from the acquisition of the mother tongue. Besides, there seems to be an agreement on the fact that adult learners tend to be more analytical since they take advantage of the teaching of linguistic concepts. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), the knowledge of the mother tongue affects the knowledge of the second language, which makes adults better learners than children.

Although most people learn their own mother tongue without any difficulty, they may encounter difficulty when learning a second language, as the ability to learn a second language depends on many variables, individual as much as social (Spada, 2013).

We can distinguish two groups of variables among individual differences: cognitive and affective. Cognitive factors frequently addressed are intelligence, aptitude and the use of learning strategies. According to Mitchell and Myles (2004), people who show more intelligence tend to learn a second language better. Moreover, it is difficult to distinguish between the aptitude to learn a language and intelligence in general, as research (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991) shows that some specific abilities match the ease to learn a language.

Some studies, such as research conducted by Ranta (2002) or Erard (2012), have shown that students with the ability to analyze the language tend to be more successful in the learning process, including those who study following a plan without a grammatical approach. Additionally, successful learners show an aptitude to work hard in order to achieve their goals.

Another cognitive factor is the use of learning strategies. Nevertheless, it has not been proven if learners are successful because they use learning strategies or if they use learning strategies because they are good learners (Santana, 2005).

Attitude is strongly linked to motivation. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) think that motivation is the desire to reach a goal. Another crucial affective factor is the anxiety towards languages (Horwitz, 1986).

This study looks into three types of learning strategies:

- Memorizing (cognitive)
- Exposure to the language (reading books, listening to music...)
- Social (contact with English-speaking people)

Wagner-Cough and Hatch (1975:307) call language learning "a process involving a blend of affective, linguistic, and cognitive variables". Schumann (1975:209) even

suggests "that affective variables may play a more important role than does biological maturation in problems associated with adult second language acquisition".

Various factors are believed to affect second language learning; among them it is possible to highlight age, intellectual capacity, motivation, creativity, social status, family, attitude and aptitude.

As Lewis and Massad (1976) point out: "Foreign languages constitute an important area of the curriculum of secondary schools in most countries, and English is among the most studied of such foreign languages". According to Lewis and Massad (1976), there are three socio-historical levels on which English may be studied: as the traditional first language of countries such as the United States, England, Australia, and parts of Canada; as an ex-colonial language being learned side-by-side with the indigenous tongue in such countries as India and some African nations; and as a major language for wider communication, playing an essential role in secondary and higher education, in the professions, especially in the scientific and technological areas.

As teachers, we have tried to cope with the problems that may arise when teaching a second language. We try to understand our students as well as their problems in the learning process, and awareness of the possible factors affecting the learning process may therefore provide a more efficient situation for the students.

Taking into account these factors allows us to design an effective approach to help our learners, as well as teaching methods that help our students in their learning process.

As it has already been indicated, due to globalization, the English language has become an essential instrument to be part of the economy. Bilingualism is a fundamental need nowadays.

I propose a general classification of the factors affecting second language learning.

Psychological and biological aspects	Cognitive and methodological aspects	Socio-affective aspects
. Gender . Age . Personality	. Learning strategies . Linguistic abilities	. Motivation . Attitude
Linguistic aspects	Environmental aspects	Socio-cultural aspects
. Knowledge of other languages	. Personal environment . Academic environment	. Socio-economic and cultural level

Table 1. General classification of factors affecting second language learning (Krashen, 1988; Gardner, 2003; Myles, 2004)

This Master's Thesis focuses on the analysis of two socio-affective aspects (motivation and attitude), one psychological aspect (personality) and one methodological factor (learning strategies). However, the author is aware of the relevance of other aspects such as age, gender and socio-cultural level of the learners.

2.1 Socio-affective and psychological factors

2.1.1 Motivation

The learning of a second language has the following goals:

- Linguistic: acquisition of aspects such as grammar and vocabulary.
- Extralinguistic: appreciation of the second language and the group of native speakers.

The second language learning can be considered as a social event so motivation is of great importance in this process. Motivation is an affective factor in the learning process and it has been defined in different ways.

For instance, motivation is defined as “some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something” (Harmer, 2001:51). According to Castro (1991:11) “motivation is, in fact, a complex phenomenon made up of four components: the setting of an objective, the desire to reach that objective, favourable attitudes towards a particular activity, and effort”. Motivation is the driving force that

moves a person to achieve his or her goals. Irrespective of the obstacles individuals find, one needs to be stimulated to keep on going. Language learning is directly related to motivation as motivation is the most important element in language learning success.

Another definition of motivation is what Lightbrown and Spada (2006:64) call instrumental and integrative motivation. They define instrumental motivation as "language learning for more immediate or practical goals" and integrative motivation as "language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment". Students with an integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) have the intention of participating in the culture of the native speakers, whereas students with instrumental motivation wish to learn the language not to be a part of the native speaker's community but just for practical reasons such as reading scientific articles, watching TV or accessing information. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), students with integrative motivation have more possibilities of success in their learning process. However, Harmer (2001) states that this kind of motivation is not a crucial aspect to be successful in the learning process since there are many other key elements such as the people surrounding the learner.

Ushioda (2008:25) understands motivation as an "emergent through complex interactions among social, individual and contextual processes", whereas for Dornyei

and Ushioda (2009:1) “Given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data”.

Pinzón (2014) shows that students are motivated to learn English by establishing a relation between the context and different issues; for instance, if they can see a connection between the vocabulary in their mind and the pedagogical activities in which they actively participate they will finally feel motivated to learn English because they are able to see the practical use of the language.

The learners of a second language have had different experiences in life and their personal backgrounds are also different, all of which are factors in determining students’ motivation. To enhance motivation, Lightbrown and Spada (2006) advise the teacher to create a helpful environment creating an atmosphere where the learners feel stimulated, carrying out activities suitable for their ages and interests. On the other hand, they uphold that the teachers should know the theories about motivation and be able to identify the features that influence the learning process. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) carried out a study based on Gardner’s socio-educational model (1985) and highlight the following variables: integration, attitude towards the condition of learning, conciliatory integration and instrumental orientation.

In order to carry out this study, these authors analysed the research conducted by Gardner and his team members where the Attitude Motivation Test Battery had been

used: a battery of questions to measure the attitude and the motivation of the students created by Gardner (2004).

The main goal of the study was to look into the magnitude of the contributions that motivation and attitudes have on the achievements of the learning of a second language. Their-main conclusions of the study are that motivation is the most important variable in order to learn a second language and that the environment where the learning takes place and the age of the students are not essential for the acquisition of a second language.

2.1.2 Attitude

In general terms, it is said that attitude is the behaviour a person adopts towards other people, things and happenings. In the acquisition of a second language, attitudes develop towards the language itself, the community of speakers, the learning experience and towards the teachers too (Gardner, 1985).

In the literature, attitudes are composed of three elements (Chaiken & Stangor 1987):

- Cognitive: comprises the perceptions towards an object.
- Affective: comprises the feelings for or against an object.
- Behavioural: the tendency to behave towards an object in a particular way.

According to Lambert and Gardner (1972), attitudes are important in the learning process because, even though they do not directly influence a learner's achievement, they form a motivational support.

Larsen-Freeman (1976) analyses different factors surrounding students that affect their attitudes. Some key factors are the following:

- Parents. Stern (1978) showed that, in the schools of Wales, the success in the learning process was connected to the attitudes of the parents towards Welsh.
- Teachers. The attitude of the teachers towards students is crucial, because it influences the quality and the quantity of students' learning process. Tucker and Lambert (1973) believe that the attitudes of the teachers are even more important than the attitudes of the parents.
- The learning context. Schumann (1975) states that learners can have negative attitudes towards learning if the teacher offers them a plan that they do not like; for example: if the syllabus the teachers propose is unappealing to them, or if it is a different syllabus from the one they would like to follow.

A well-known hypothesis concerning affection in language learning is Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. It explains why, although some people are exposed to a great amount of comprehensible input, they do not acquire an acceptable level of the second language competences. Krashen (1988) upholds that this happens because of an

affective filter; an impediment to acquire a second language although the exposure is correct. Some variables that form the affective filter are motivation, anxiety and confidence. Students who do not have a positive attitude will have a stronger filter and, consequently, they will not internalise the linguistic input. Hence, the affective filter affects the learning process positively or negatively.

2.1.3 Personality

According to Zhang (2008:59), “personality is built while the person is growing; despite the fact that the genetic factors play an important role, the environment also influences and helps to define personality”. Hence, Zhang (2008) considers that it is necessary for the teachers to get used to the individuality of the students.

Second language learners can have different profiles; however, depending on the context, their learning process may be totally different. Research tries to find which kind of personality is more favourable to learn a second language. There is agreement on two key features of personality that seem to influence the learning process: extraversion and anxiety. It is believed that extraverts are better in learning foreign languages; Naiman (1978) does support this relation. Although it is not very clear how extraversion can influence the learning process, it is assumed that features such as inhibition and introversion negatively influence the learners’ oral expression.

Introverted people take less advantage of opportunities to speak, so their learning process is slower. Extroverted people do not mind making mistakes and they practice more so their learning process is faster and efficient.

Naiman's research (1978) studied 72 Canadian high school students from grades 8, 10 and 12 who were studying French as a second language. About 70% of the students with the higher grades considered themselves extroverted people. The study concluded that students who feel afraid of making mistakes while speaking try to avoid opportunities to improve their knowledge.

Anxiety has also been a central focus of many studies but with inconsistent results. Hilgard (1963) and Chastain (1975) have underlined the importance of affectivity and considered that the causes of successful learning processes could be attributed to affective reasons. Chastain (1975) states that cognitive skills are of great importance, as much as the affective characteristics. So, students' opinions about their learning process have a decisive effect on it.

Chastain (1975) suggests that there are at least three kinds of variables that affect the learning process: anxiety, personality and creativity. Schumann (1975) and his study on the attitudes of students of French as a second language and their influence on their learning process (based on Gardner, 1974) suggests that the most successful learners had a positive attitude towards the learning of French, towards the course

material and the teacher. On the other hand, the students who suffer from anxiety did not have the same knowledge of the language compared to those who felt relaxed in the classroom.

According to Horwitz (1986), anxiety emerges from three main sources: communicative apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and fear of failing the language exams. Horwitz (1986:130) states that language anxiety is “a distinct set of beliefs, perceptions, and feelings in response to foreign language learning in the classroom”.

In connection with a study by Naiman, Frölich and Stern (1978), Sánchez-López (1992) and Sánchez-Herrero (1991) point out the degree of disagreement among teachers when they are asked about the features of personality that make language learning easier. The problem lies not only in the difficulty of measuring aspects such as personality but also in the expectations of the teachers regarding attitude and motivation of the students.

Robinson (1994) thinks that extraversion is essential when considering oral skills; however, introversion is related to better marks on written tests.

Kleinmann (1977) concluded that anxiety may play an important role in a learner's achievement. In an effort to understand why some students have more

difficulties when learning a second language, since the 70s there have been many studies about it trying to establish a relation between foreign language learning and affective variables; in particular, Oxford (2005) suggests that anxiety in foreign language learning is one of those variables which affects second language learning.

Another study carried out by Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999) looked into the connection between anxiety in the language class, anxiety in writing activities in class, and their quality. The data collection was through a questionnaire; a transformed version of the FLCAS. The results supported Aida's statement about the relation between the FLCAS and oral production.

2.1.4 Learning strategies

Rubin (1975:43) provides a broad definition of learning strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge".

According to Wender and Rubin (1987), learning strategies refer to what learners do to learn and regulate their learning. Embi (2001) defines learning strategies as plans and actions that learners take to enhance the process of language learning.

Learning strategies have been classified according to different taxonomies. The following classification is a traditional taxonomy of learning strategies:

Metacognitive	Cognitive	Social-affective
. Self-evaluation . Self-reinforcement . Selective attention . Advance preparation	. Repetition . Translation . Note-taking . Grouping . Question for clarification . Deduction	. Cooperation

Table 2. Classification of learning strategies (O'Malley, 1990)

Metacognitive strategies are those which help the learner understand the way they learn, the way they plan and manage their learning. Cognitive strategies help the student to learn more successfully and social-affective strategies help students to manage emotions, to interact with other students (O'Malley, 1990).

3.1 Social factors

Social factors refer to any feature of a community that may influence a learner's acquisition of a second language. Culture and status also affect the learning process, sometimes in an indirect way. This factor could be related to the access to native speakers or the opportunity to interact with them outside the classroom. That access is not only good for pronunciation and vocabulary but for opinions learners may have about certain topics.

Prodromou (1992, quoted by López Montero et al., 2014:436) studied cross-cultural factors in language learning to understand the importance of elements related to bicultural teaching, the cultural context of the lesson, or students' perceptions, among other aspects. He concluded that knowledge of the target culture is an important part of the language learning process since it enhances the pleasure in discovering more about a new culture.

Rezaee (2011, quoted by López Montero et al., 2014:436) studied in 2011 the socio-cultural aspects of second language learning and the combination of those aspects to understand the connection between social factors and language learning. The author concluded that in order to learn or teach another language, elements such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar are rather important, but the author also recommends taking socio-cultural aspects into account. Learning a language through culture is not just fascinating, but necessary.

According to Gholami (2012, quoted by López Montero et al., 2014:436), the social context has an influence on students' attitude by providing learning opportunities that emphasize learners' results. Students acquire a language by using social interaction with speakers of that language.

Matsumoto (2009, quoted by López Montero et al., 2014:436), studied how motivation affects students, from different cultural backgrounds, who were learning

foreign languages in Australia. The author wanted to see if their learning experiences in a course changed their motivation. The author also tried to detect differences among the students from four different cultural backgrounds. The study concludes that the culture of the educational environment has effects on the learners. Social context encircles language in different ways; Pishghadam (2011:152) establishes that “social capital might include: number of close friends, presence of two parents at home, number of siblings, extracurricular activities, church attendance, parent knowledge of children’s friends, parent’s employment, parent monitoring and involvement in education”. All these sources are also significant to academic achievement.

Indeed, Pishghadam (2011) believes that the learners who own more cultural goods and have access to a larger social network can secure more success in education.

Arikan (2011) understands that students with higher socio-economic status show higher academic accomplishment, and also apply for the best universities as opposed to those students with lower socio-economic status.

Income tends to be associated with the possibilities of future education, but there are also exceptions and the role of the parents, which is also mentioned in the study by Pishghadam (2011), is crucial to achieve higher education and consequently facilitates the possibility to get a better job and a better social status.

It is generally believed that children acquire more easily a second language, although this is a controversial issue.

Snow (1998:256) performed studies that showed that “the earlier the first language learning, the better the second language general fluency”. Another possible factor that may affect second language learning is gender, as females are believed to be better language learners.

A well-known paradigm is Gardner’s socio-educational model (1988). This model has been revised by many authors (Cook 2001, among others) and has been used to describe the success of the learners of a second language in a classroom.

Gardner’s socio-educational model (1988) has two variables: cognitive and affective. Cognitive variables refer to linguistic aptitudes and intelligence, whereas affective variables include the attitudes towards learning, motivation and integration.

Among some previous researchers, we find the one by Minera (2010) who carries out a study with 96 students from the University of Munich, all of whom studying different degrees with the exception of Spanish. The students study Spanish as an elective class. This study analyses the affective variables that concern second language learning.

3.2 The role of the parents

The support human beings receive from their parents is crucial to face any process in life. As Pishghadam (2011, quoted by López Montero et al., 2014:439) claims, “aspects such as the presence of two parents at home, parent monitoring and their involvement in education are sources in charge of providing the necessary input they might need in their academic achievement”.

If parents and teachers share information, teachers can use strategies and factors that facilitate and improve language acquisition; family involvement is crucial as we have mentioned before. As Easterbrooks and Baker (2002:84) stated, “successful children come from committed parents”.

Easterbrooks and Baker (2002) believe that families are an integral part of language development. Gunning (2007:13) reiterated this point by claiming that “achieving educational outcomes (regarding literacy specifically) cannot be done only at school”. He maintains that “it is a responsibility shared by all citizens and, most importantly, “parents... need to become partners in their children’s lives”.

4. A study on the internal and external variables affecting second language learning.

This study aims to look into students' motivation when acquiring a second language. Students' level of motivation and attitude is analysed on the basis of the attitude / motivation test battery proposed by Gardner (2004).

4.1 Context and participants

This study was conducted among 35 participants: 15 males and 20 females; between 17 and 30 years of age. They are former students of the author whom she met when she worked as a teacher of English in Herrera (Seville). Some of them just studied secondary education and some of them finished their degrees some years ago. The students came from different places of Andalusia and they were different from each other, in terms of academic achievements as well as personality, attitude towards the different subjects and motivation. The participants had studied in a Secondary school located in Herrera, in a quiet village of Seville with about 6,500 inhabitants.

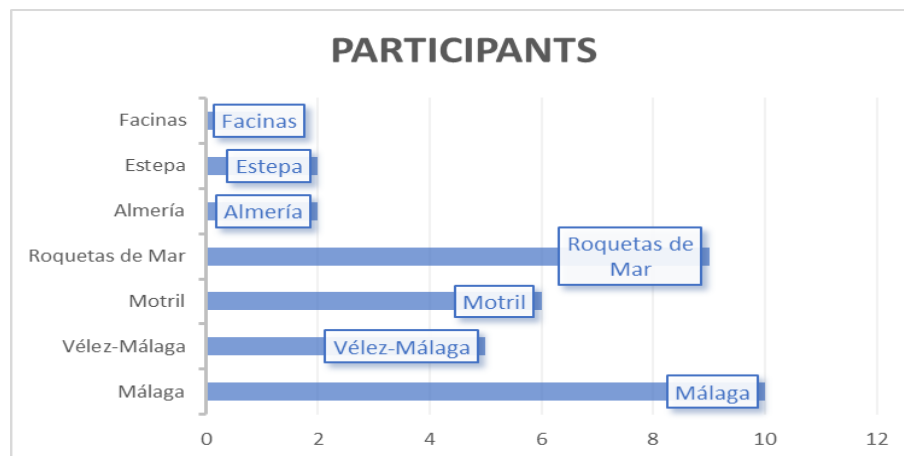
The high school consists of a building, an outside patio for sports and a small covered pavilion. Inside there are 19 classrooms, most of them with the students' desks distributed in pairs, a multi-use room, a library with computers, an audiovisual room, a laboratory and specific classrooms for Music and Arts.

It is a bilingual high school with 350 students with three lines in Secondary education and two varieties of Bachillerato. There are two routes of Bachillerato: Social Sciences and Humanities.

Please, find below a chart with the participants' places of origin:

Places where participants come from	Amount of participants
Málaga	10
Vélez-Málaga	5
Motril	6
Roquetas de Mar	9
Almería	2
Estepa	2
Facinas	1

Table 3. Place of origin of the participants



Graph 1. Places where participants come from

For the purpose of this study, it is important to ascertain the socio-economic status of the participants.

4.2 Instrument

Through questionnaires we gather information objectively. Questionnaires are used to cover a large geographical area, and the results are easily quantified.

Extraversion and anxiety are the two most relevant key characteristics in the study of second language learning. These features have been observed through the FLCAS (foreign language class anxiety scale) by Horwitz and Cope (1986), a questionnaire made up of 30 items with a 1 to 5 Likert scale.

In this case, the instrument used was based on the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) by Gardner (2004)

The author's questionnaire	AMTB
1 I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly	1 I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly
2 My parents try to help me to learn English	2 My parents try to help me to learn English

3 Learning English is really great	6 Learning English is really great
4 I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English	9 I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English
5 Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable	12 Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable
6 Studying English is important because I will need it for my career	15 Studying English is important because I will need it for my career
7 I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages	21 I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages
8 My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English	22 My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English
9 Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends	27 Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends

10	50
Studying English is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the English way of life	Studying English is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the English way of life
11	32
I really have no interest in foreign languages	I really have no interest in foreign languages
12	35
Studying English is important because it will make me more educated	Studying English is important because it will make me more educated
13	53
Native English speakers have much to be proud about because they have given the world much of value	Native English speakers have much to be proud about because they have given the world much of value
14	59
Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job	Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job
15	65
If I planned to stay in another country, I	If I planned to stay in another country, I

would try to learn their language	would try to learn their language
16 I would like to know more native English speakers	71 I would like to know more native English speakers
17 To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English	81 To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English
18 My level of English is rather high	Designed by the author
19 I really want to know about other cultures	Designed by the author
20 High income gives you a better education	Designed by the author
21 Women learn faster than men	Designed by the author
22 In my case, there is a direct connection between my socio-economic background and my level of English	Designed by the author
23 My parents encourage me to learn English	Designed by the author
24 The women I know are better at learning	Designed by the author

languages	
25 I consider myself an open-minded person	Designed by the author
26 My father's educational level is connected with my learning process	Designed by the author
27 My mother's educational level is connected with my learning process	Designed by the author
28 My level of English depends on the teachers I have had	78 I would prefer to have a different English teacher 89 I really like my English teacher
29 My level on English depends on my motivation	Designed by the author
30 Learning English before the age of 4 is a key factor in the learning process	Designed by the author

The questionnaire sent to the participants by email is reproduced below:

Questionnaire - Answer as accurately as possible	1. Strongly disagree	2. Moderately disagree	3. Slightly disagree	4. Slightly agree	5. Moderately agree	6. Strongly agree
1. I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly.						
2. My parents try/tried to help me to learn English.						
3. Learning English is really great.						
4. I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.						
5. Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable.						
6. Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.						
7. I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages.						
8. My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.						
9. Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends.						
10. Studying English is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.						
11. I really have no interest in foreign languages.						
12. Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.						
13. Native English speakers have much to be proud about because they have given the world much of value.						
14. Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.						
15. If I planned to stay in another country, I would try to learn their language.						
16. I would like to know more native English speakers.						
17. To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English.						
18. My level of English is rather high.						
19. I really want to know other cultures.						
20. High income gives you a better education.						
21. Women learn faster than men.						
22. In my case, there is a direct connection between my socio-economic background and my level of English.						
23. My parents encourage me to learn English.						
24. The women I know are better at learning languages.						
25. I consider myself an openminded person.						
26. My father's educational level is connected with my learning process.						
27. My mother's educational level is connected with my learning process.						
28. My level of English depends directly on the teachers I have had.						
29. My level of English depends on my motivation.						
30. Learning English before the age of 4 is a key factor in the learning process.						

Table 4. Questionnaire designed for this research

The content of the questionnaire is varied and contains different variables that supposedly affect the learning process such as personality, motivation, attitude, social factors, linguistic and socio-economic background and the role of the parents.

The method is quantitative since numerical data is gathered, and closed-ended statements are used with a scale of agreement. As I have mentioned previously, they are scaling questions so the results are handily quantified although "human error is

highly involved in content analysis, since there is the risk for researchers to misinterpret the data gathered, thereby generating false and unreliable conclusions” (Krippendorff & Bock, 2008).

4.3 Procedure, data gathering and data analysis

The questionnaire was sent at the beginning of April 2017 by email to 35 participants, all of them former students who were selected due to their heterogeneity and diversity, as mentioned before. The participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire individually in 30 minutes and send it back to the author in one week.

The questionnaires are confidential and used for academic purposes of this research. All the data obtained has been treated anonymously.

Apart from the questionnaire sent to the participants, there were some open-ended questions that allow the author to know the age of the participants, the place of birth, their parents’ educational level, their own educational level and also the age at which they started to learn English as a foreign language.

The obtained data was analyzed statistically. With the help of an excel document the author has analyzed the quantitative data obtained, by means of descriptive statistics, considering the mean and the mode. The mean describes the central tendency, adding

all the values and dividing by the numbers of values we obtain the central disposition.

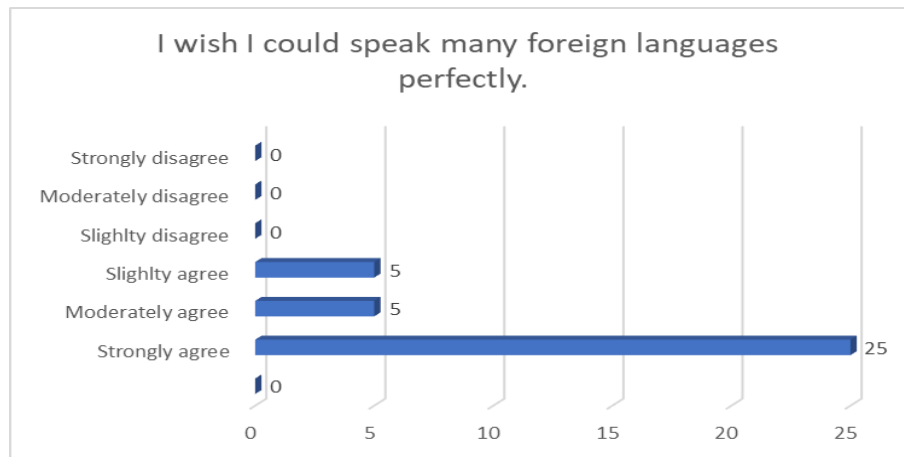
The mode shows the most common ranking, the value that appears more frequently.

5. Results and analysis

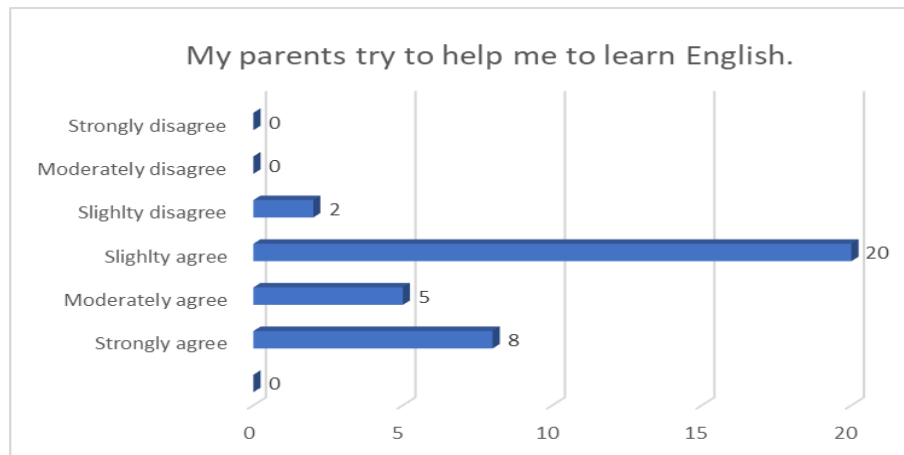
The table below shows a summary of the results. To interpret the results of this study the information has been grouped into three main sections: social aspects (age, socio-economical context, linguistic background and culture), parental role and relationship between social context and students' motivation.

Questionnaire - Answer as accurately as possible	1. Strongly disagree	2. Moderately disagree	3. Slightly disagree	4. Slightly agree	5. Moderately agree	6. Strongly agree	Mean	Mode
1. I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly.	0	0	0	5	5	25	5,6	6
2. My parents try/tried to help me to learn English.	8	5	20	2	0	0	2,5	3
3. Learning English is really great.	0	0	5	15	5	10	4,6	4
4. I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	1	5	3	1	15	10	4,5	5
5. Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable.	10	3	6	5	0	11	3,4	6
6. Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.	0	0	0	5	10	20	5,4	6
7. I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages.	0	0	0	8	8	19	5,3	6
8. My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.	0	0	0	5	0	30	5,7	6
9. Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends.	2	5	10	3	0	15	4,1	6
10. Studying English is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	15	5	5	0	5	5	2,7	1
11. I really have no interest in foreign languages.	20	5	5	0	0	5	2,1	1
12. Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.	25	10	5	0	0	0	1,7	1
13. Native English speakers have much to be proud about because they have given the world much of value.	15	5	5	0	5	5	2,7	1
14. Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.	0	0	0	0	2	33	5,9	6
15. If I planned to stay in another country, I would try to learn their language.	0	0	0	2	3	30	5,8	6
16. I would like to know more native English speakers.	0	0	5	2	13	15	5,1	6
17. To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English.	15	13	7	0	0	0	1,8	1
18. My level of English is rather high.	15	0	0	5	5	10	3,4	1
19. I really want to know other cultures.	0	0	0	10	15	10	5,0	5
20. High income gives you a better education.	0	0	0	5	2	28	5,7	6
21. Women learn faster than men.	20	5	0	0	0	10	2,6	1
22. In my case, there is a direct connection between my socio-economic background and my level of English.	16	10	0	0	0	9	2,6	1
23. My parents encourage me to learn English.	5	3	3	15	4	5	3,7	4
24. The women I know are better at learning languages.	9	3	4	0	7	12	3,8	6
25. I consider myself an openminded person.	0	0	0	13	12	20	6,6	6
26. My father's educational level is connected with my learning process.	15	0	0	3	0	17	3,7	6
27. My mother's educational level is connected with my learning process.	15	0	0	3	0	17	3,7	6
28. My level of English depends directly on the teachers I have had.	0	2	6	7	0	20	4,9	6
29. My level of English depends on my motivation.	0	0	0	1	2	32	5,9	6
30. Learning English before the age of 4 is a key factor in the learning process.	5	2	3	8	0	17	4,3	6

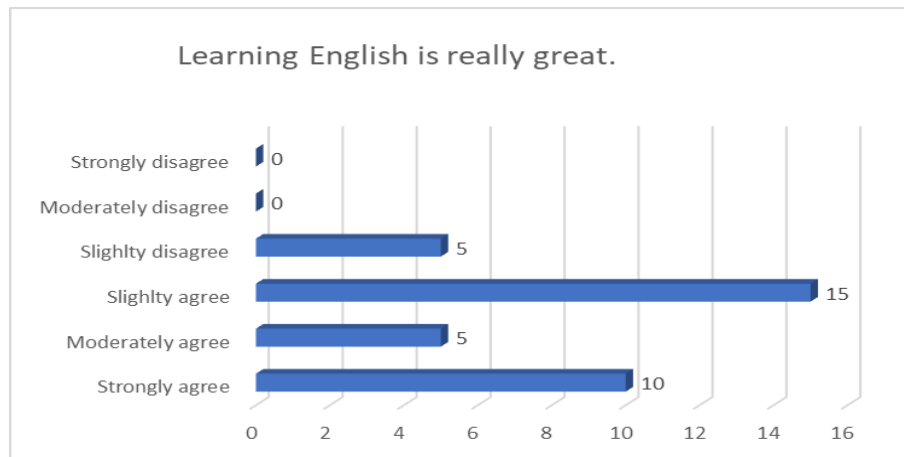
Table 5. Results of the questionnaire including mean and mode



In connection with item number 1, “I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly”, no participants disagree. Indeed, most of them (25) would like to speak many foreign languages perfectly (mean=5.6, mode=6).



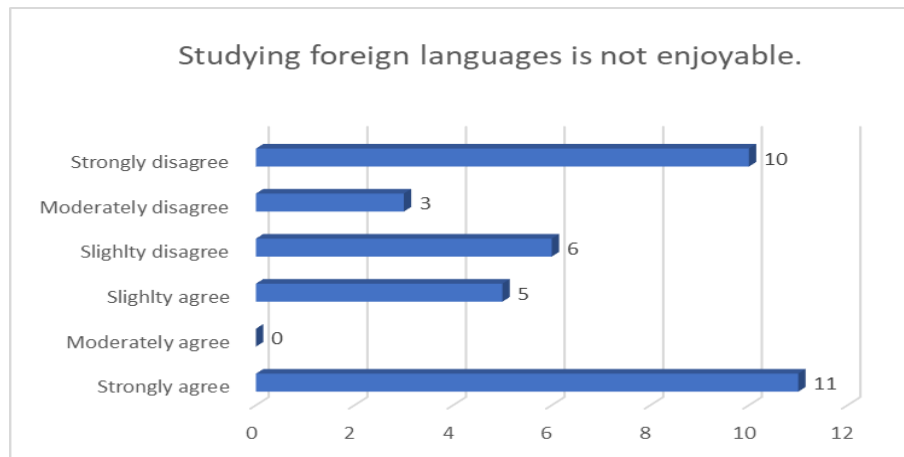
According to item number 2, “My parents try to help me to learn English”, 20 participants state that that their parents do not try or did not try to help them learn English. Interestingly, no participants strongly agree (mean=2.5, mode=3).



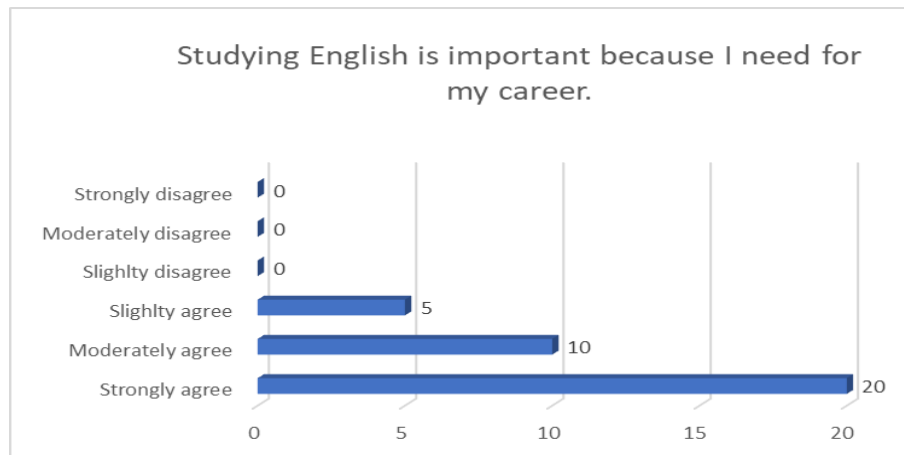
Regarding item number 3, “Learning English is really great”, 15 of the participants slightly agree that learning English is really great whereas no participants strongly disagree (mean=4.6, mode=4).



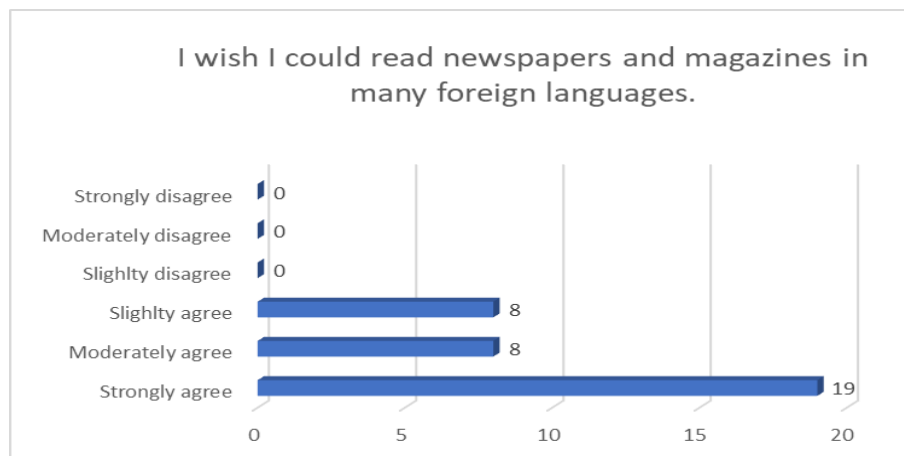
Concerning item number 4, “I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English”, 15 of the participants moderately agree that they have a strong desire to know all aspects of English and just 1 person strongly disagrees (mean=4.5, mode=5).



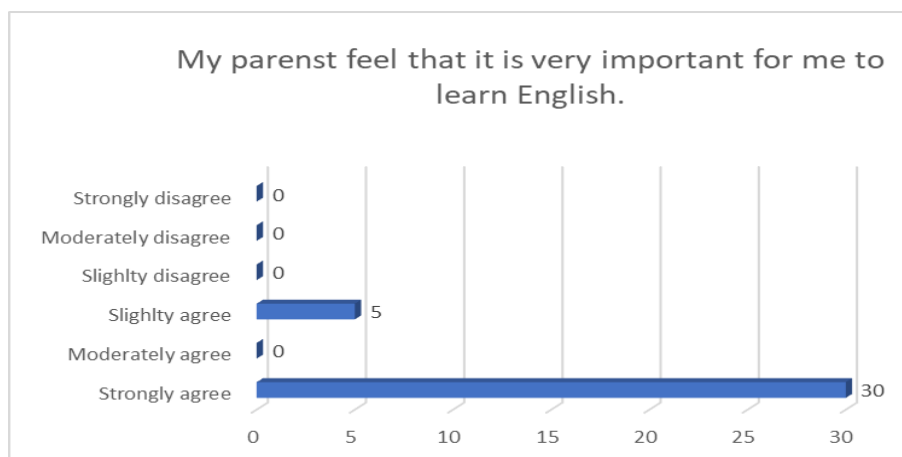
With regards to item number 5, “Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable”, 19 participants disagree that studying foreign languages is not enjoyable, however, no participants moderately agree (mean=3.4, mode=6).



Analysing item number 6, “Studying English is important because I will need it for my career”, no participants disagree, in fact, 20 participants strongly agree that studying English is important because they need it for their career (Mean=5.4, mode=6).

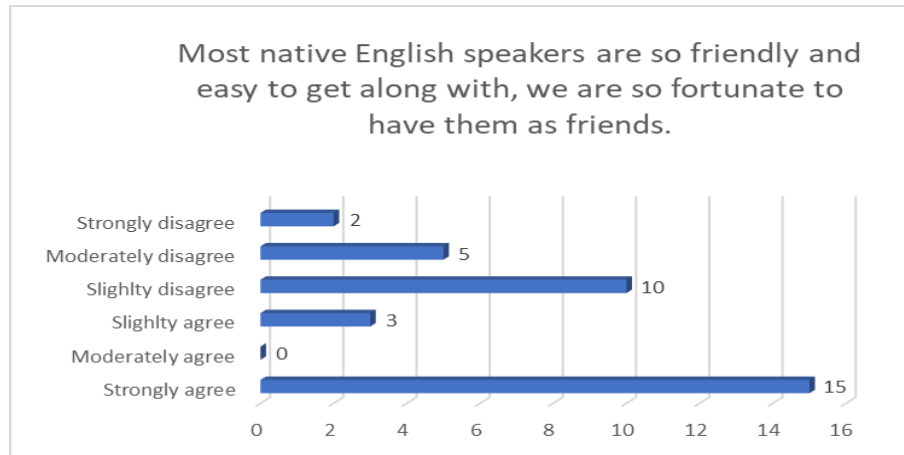


As can be seen in item number 7, “I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages”, 19 participants strongly agree that they would like to read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages (mean=5.3, mode=6).

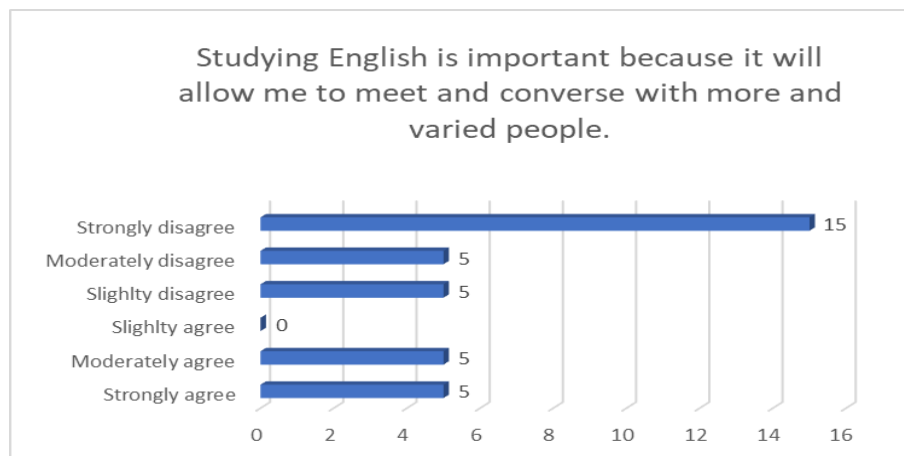


According to item number 8, “My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English”, 30 participants think their parents feel that English is very important for

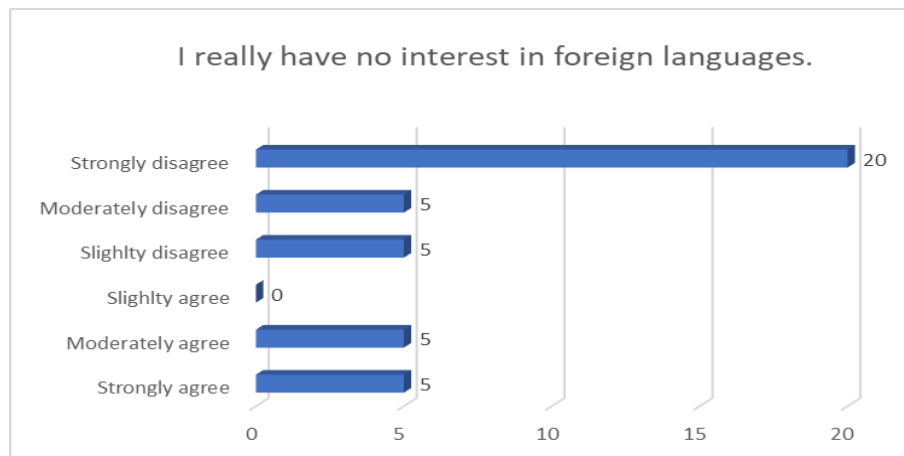
them and that their parents really want their children to learn it; curiously, no participants disagree (mean=5.7, mode=6).



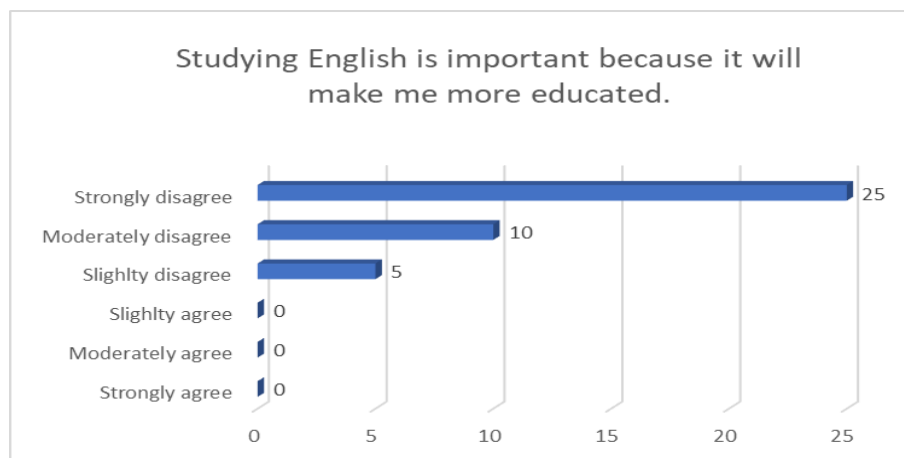
It is also reflected in item number 9, “Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends”, with which just 15 participants strongly agree that most native English speakers are friendly and almost half of the participants disagree in some way (mean=4.1, mode=6).



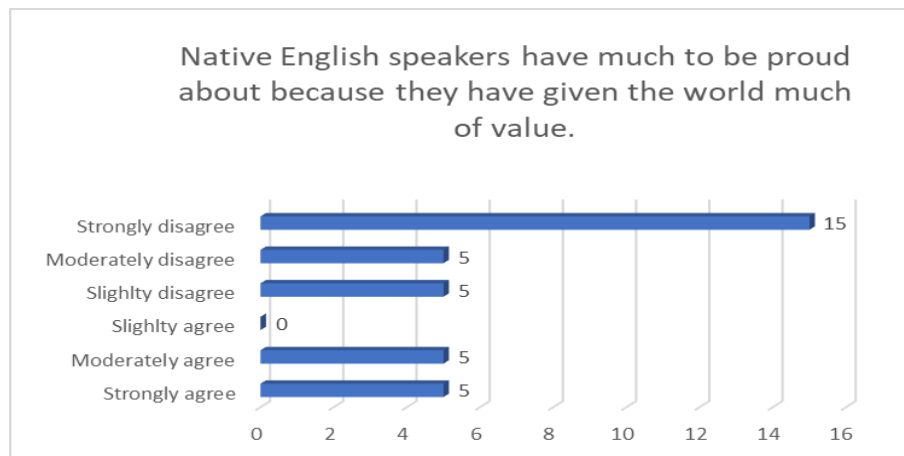
According to item number 10, “Studying English is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the English way of life”, 15 participants strongly disagree that studying English is important because it allows them to meet and converse with more people (mean=2.7, mode=1).



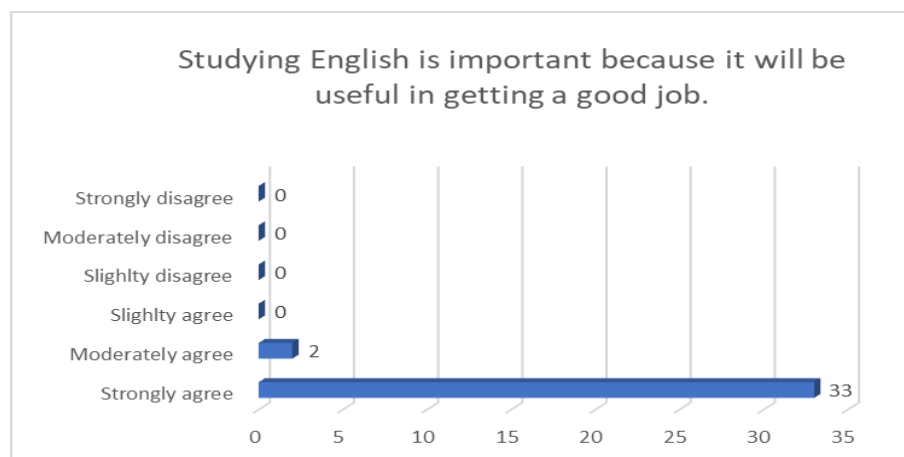
Regarding number 11, “I really have no interest in foreign language”, 20 participants strongly disagree and just 5 of them strongly agree (mean=2.1, mode=1).



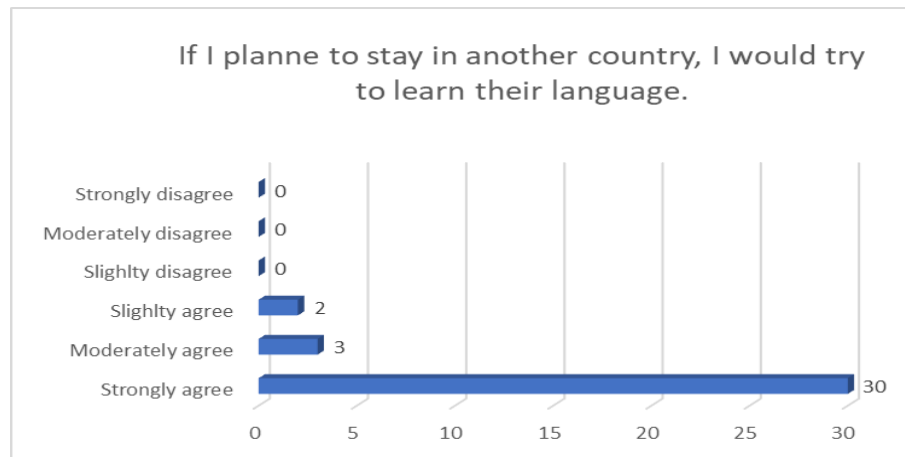
According to item number 12, “Studying English is important because it will make me more educated, 25 participants strongly disagree and no one agrees (mean=1.7, mode=1).



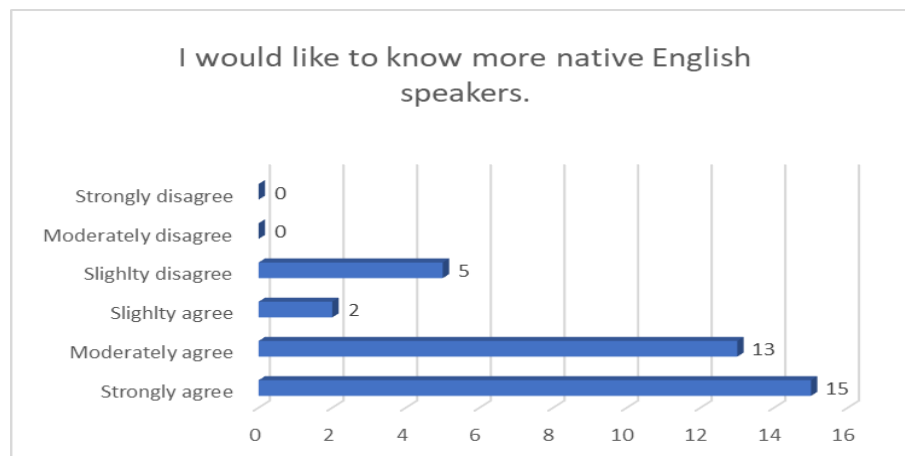
In connection with item number 13, “Native English speakers have much to be proud of because they have given the world much of value”, 15 participants strongly disagree that native speakers have much to be proud of (mean=2.7, mode=1).



According to item number 14, “Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job”, most of the participants (33) strongly agree that studying English is important because it will be useful to get a good job (mean=5.9, mode=6).



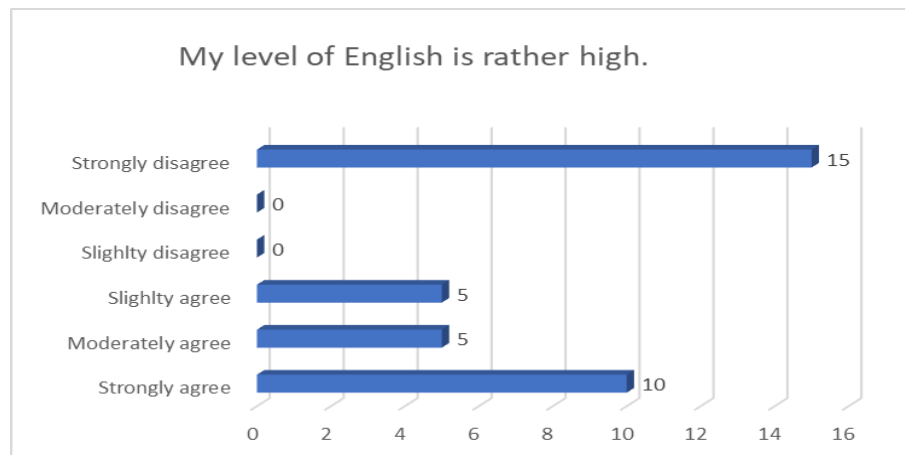
Regarding item number 15, “If I planned to stay in another country, I would try to learn their language”, 30 participants strongly agree and no participants disagree (mean=5.8, mode=6).



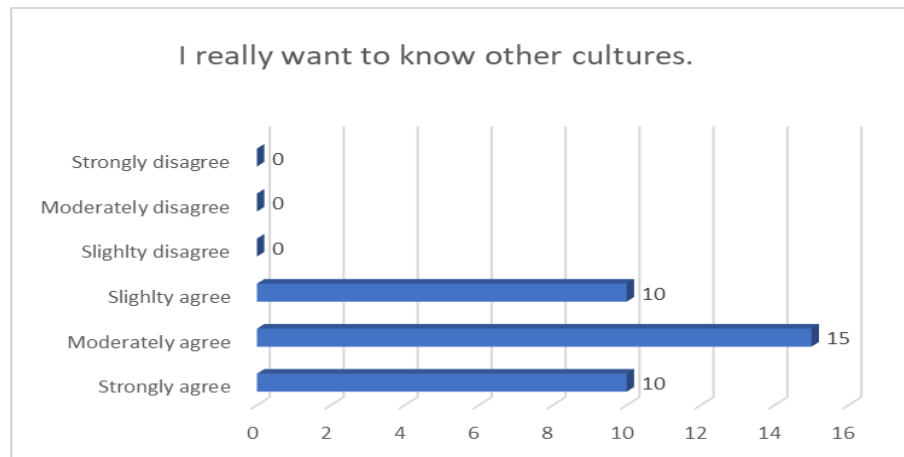
According to item number 16, “I would like to know more native English speakers”, 15 of the participants would like to know more English speakers (mean=5.1, mode=6).



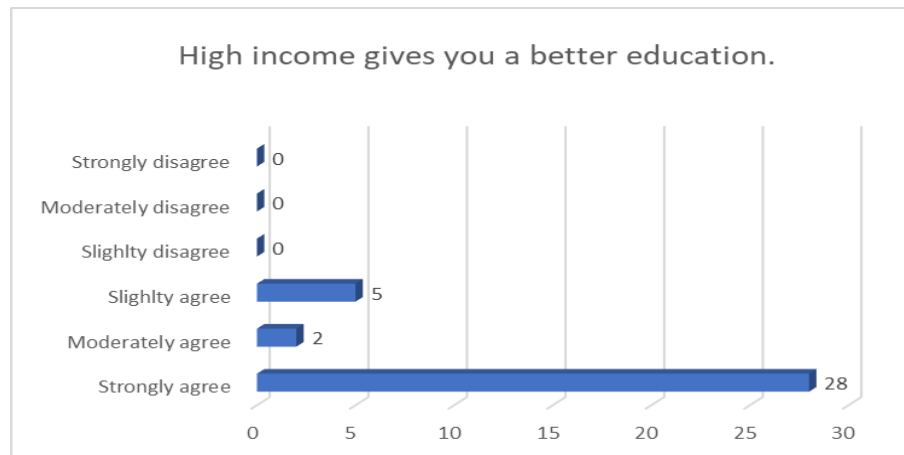
Respecting item number 17, “To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English”, 15 participants strongly disagree that they do not have any desire to learn English; in this case, no participants disagree (mean=1.8, mode=1).



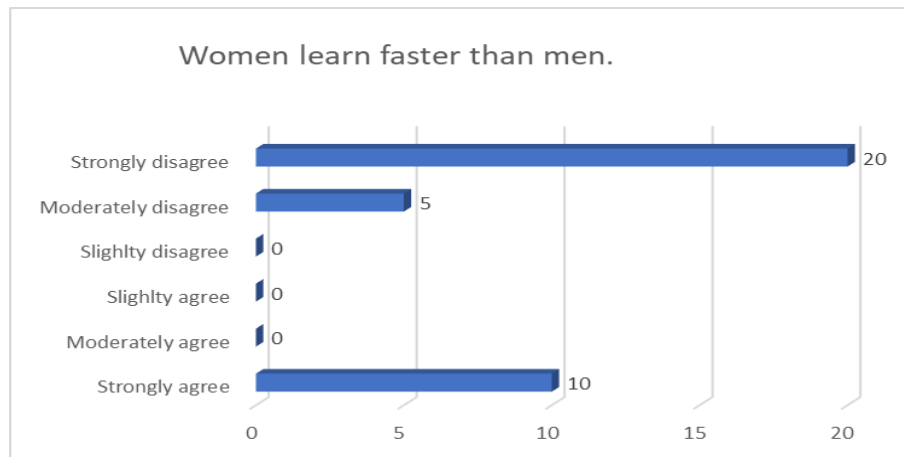
About item number 18, “My level of English is rather high”, 15 participants strongly disagree that their level of English is rather high (mean=3.4, mode=1).



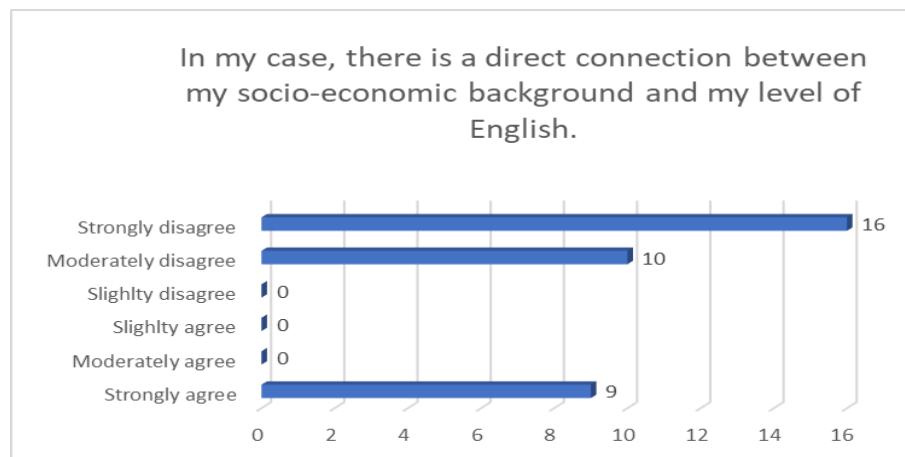
As regards to item number 19, “I really want to know other cultures”, 15 participants moderately agree that they really want to know other cultures; no participants disagree (mean=5, mode=5).



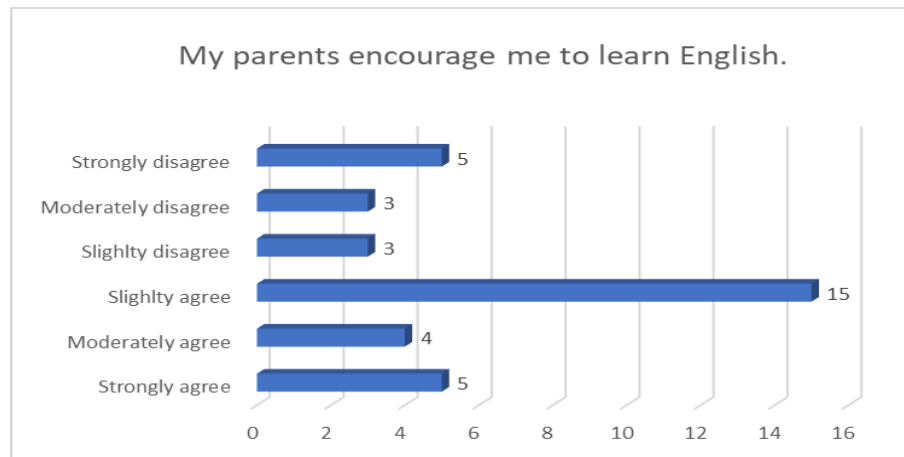
With reference to item number 20, “High income gives you a better education”, 28 participants strongly agree that high income gives you a better education while no participant disagrees (mean=5.7, mode=6).



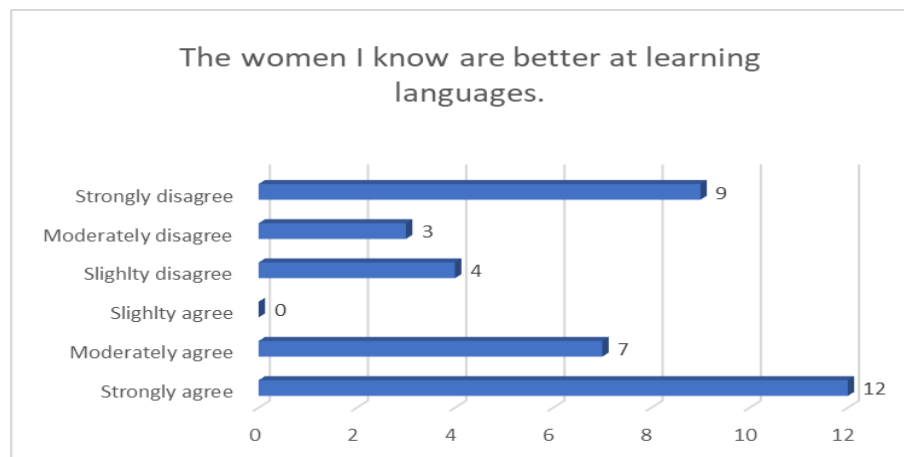
According to item number 21, “Women learn faster than men”, 20 participants strongly disagree that women learn faster than men; some of them (10) strongly agree (mean=2.6, mode=1).



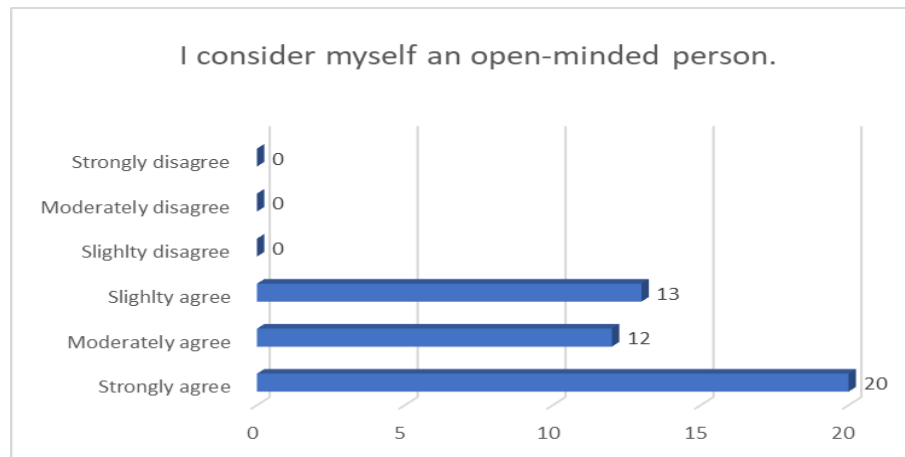
In relation to item number 22, “In my case, there is a direct connection between my socio-economic background and my level of English”, 26 participants disagree that there is a direct connection between their socio-economic background and their level of English; just a few respondents (9) strongly agree (mean=2.65, mode=1).



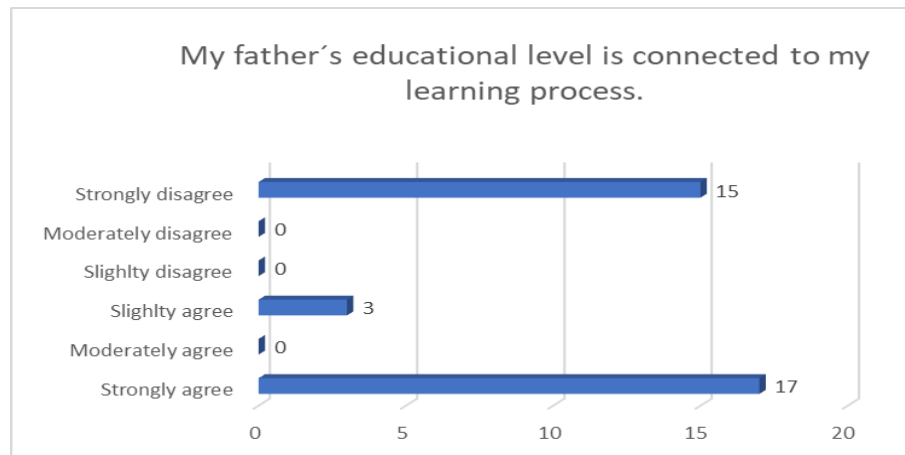
According to item number 23, “My parents encourage me to learn English”, 15 participants slightly agree that their parents encourage them to learn English (mean=3.7, mode=4).



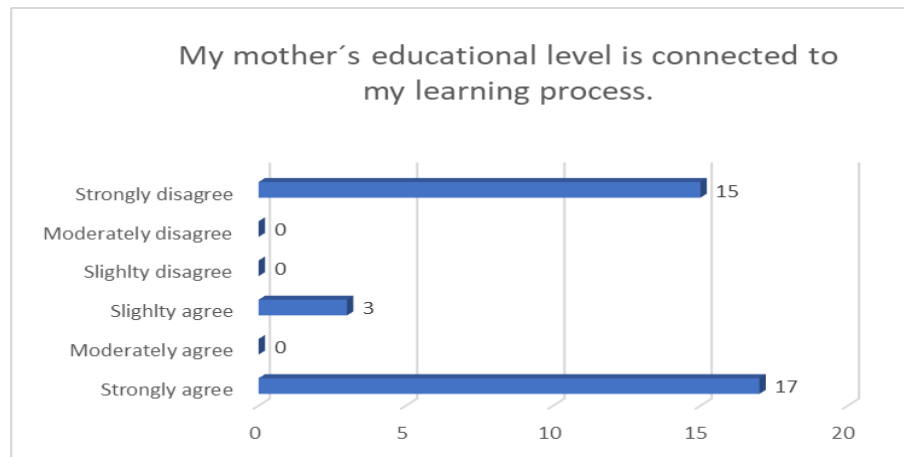
With respect to item number 24, “The women I know are better at learning languages”, 12 participants strongly agree that the women they know are better at learning languages (mean=3.8, mode=6).



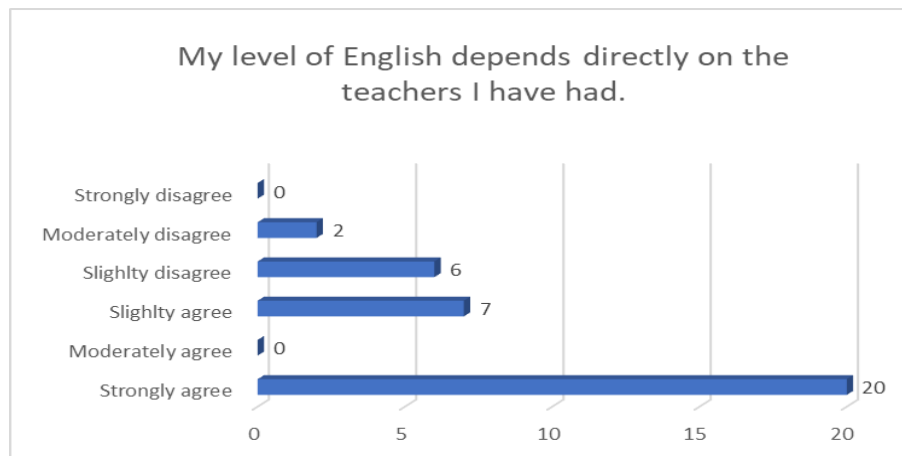
According to item number 25, “I consider myself an open-minded person”, 20 participants strongly agree that they consider themselves an open-minded person (mean=6.6, mode=6).



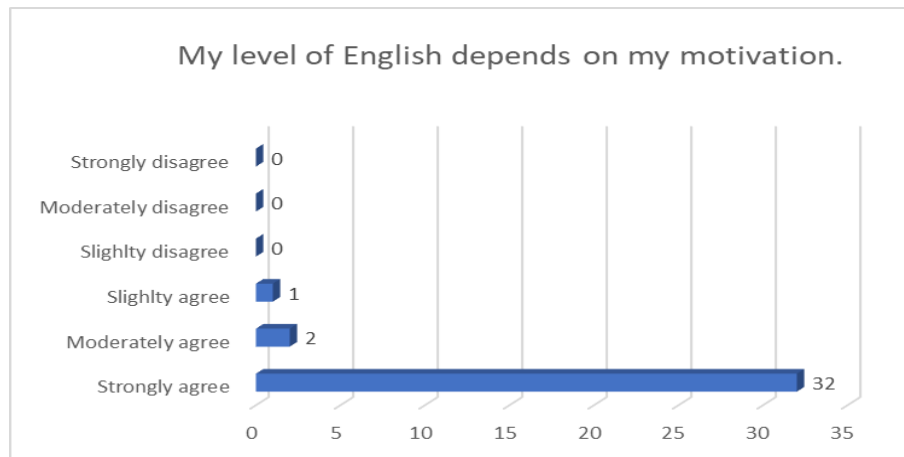
Concerning item number 26, “My father’s educational level is connected with my learning process”, 17 participants strongly agree that their father’s educational level is connected to their learning process (mean=3.7, mode=6).



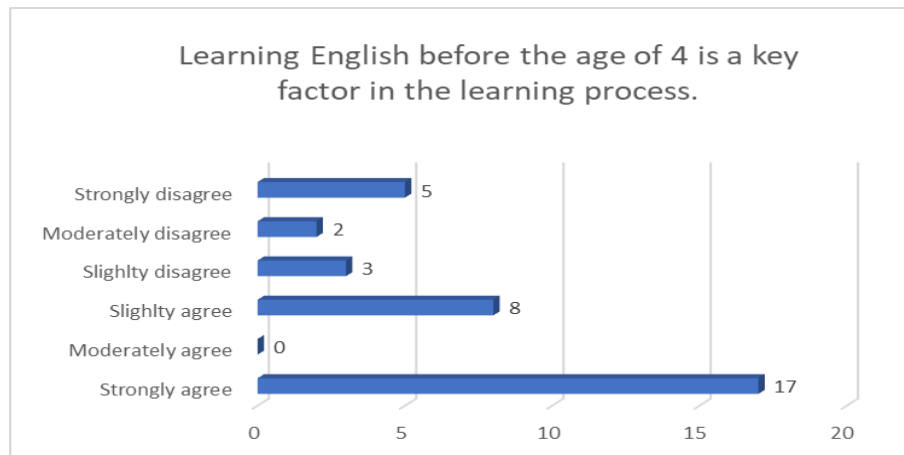
Likewise in item number 27, “My mother’s educational level is connected with my learning process”, the results are the same as in the assertion above (number 26) 17 participants strongly agree that their mother’s educational level is connected to their learning process (mean=3.7, mode=6).



Regarding item number 28, “My level of English depends on the teachers I have had”, 20 participants strongly agree that their level of English depends directly on the teachers they have had (mean=4.9, mode=6).



According to item number 29, “My level on English depends on my motivation”, 32 participants strongly agree that their level of English depends on their motivation (mean=5.9, mode=6).



In relation to item number 30, “Learning English before the age of 4 is a key in the learning process”, 17 participants strongly agree that learning English before the age of 4 is a key in the learning process (mean=4.3, mode=6).

The answers to the questionnaire related to social aspects, reveal that 48% of the participants think that learning English before the age of 4 is a key element in the learning process (item 30). As graph 3 reflects (page 53), just 5 participants started learning English before the age of 4. Item 18, which asks participants to reflect upon their level of English is connected to the age at which they started learning, since 42% of the participants think their level of English is not high.

Questions 20 and 21 are related to the socio-economic context: 28 participants strongly agree that high income gives individuals the possibility to get a better education; by contrast, 26 participants disagree that their socioe-conomic background has a direct connection with their level of English.

Questions 2, 8, 23, 26 and 27 are related to the parents' role: 30 participants strongly agree that their parents felt that learning English was very important for them. On the contrary, 33 participants disagree that their parents tried to help them study English and the answer about the encouragement parents give to their children is varied, but almost all of the participants slightly agree about it. To sum up, parents are aware of the importance of learning English, though they do not help their children in their learning process; maybe it is a question of time or educational level.

Regarding the linguistic background, just 15 participants strongly agree that native speakers are friendly and that they feel fortunate to have them as friends. 71% of

the participants do not agree that native English speakers have much to be proud however, 85% agree that they would like to know more native English speakers. They seem to know the importance of practising with native speakers.

Motivation is a key aspect that affects language learning and, according to the questionnaire, 91% agree on the all-important role of motivation: 57% of the participants think English is important for their career and 94% think learning English will be useful in getting a good job. Hence, motivation stems from considerations about their social status because 25 participants disagree that the importance of English results from allowing people to meet and converse.

In terms of gender, 20 participants strongly agree that women learn faster than men and 12 of them agree that the women they know are better at learning languages.

Data reveals that there is an interest in learning the English language but, is there any interest in learning about the culture of English-speaking countries? All the participants agree that they really want to learn about other cultures. Indeed, one of the best ways to learn a second language is through its culture(s). Twenty-six participants state that they have a strong desire to know all the aspects related to English, not just the language.

Being an open-minded person makes the learning of a second language easier. 20 participants state that their level of English is rather high and all of them agree, although at different levels, that they are open-minded people, consequently there is a connection between the kind of personality and the ability to learn a second language, as mentioned in section 2.1.3 Personality, it is believed that extraverted people are better in learning foreign languages and, for instance, Naiman (1978) supports this connection.

Additionally, the exposure to a second language influences the learner process, attitude and motivation, all of which are crucial factors when learning a second language. Learning a language is not just studying grammar and vocabulary; it goes beyond and people who want to acquire a second language are aware of that.

Anybody can learn at any stage with the proper motivation and background. The participants are conscious of the importance of learning a second language, in this case English, in order to get a good job and, consequently, achieve a better status. This encourages them to keep going.

Since most of the participants did not answer about the monthly income of their families, it is not possible establish a connection with their level of English.

As to the role of the teacher in the learning process, the answers reflect the importance of having a good teacher; 20 participants admit the relevance of this element.

Finally, the need to be connected to the world is reflected in question 7 about learners' wishes to be able to read newspapers in other languages: all the participants agree on its relevance.

5.1 Social aspects

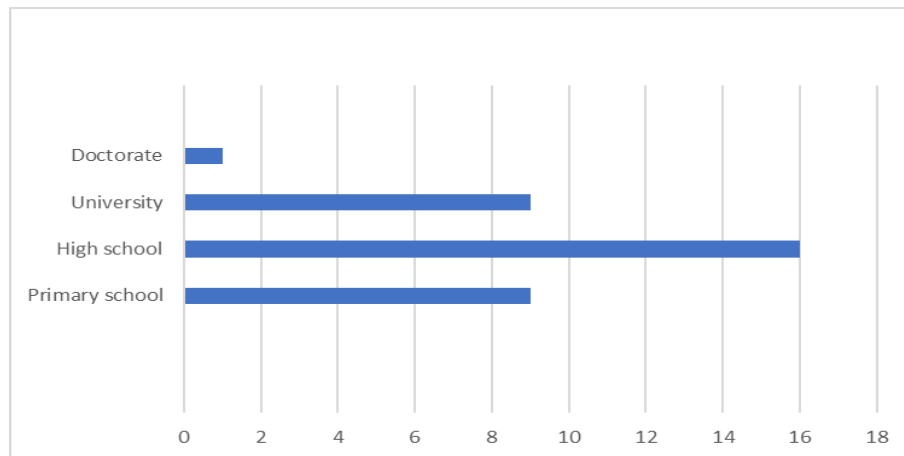
The age factor is one of the features that has been analysed. As mentioned before, the age range of the participants goes from 17 to 30. All the participants have had the same learning opportunities to carry on with their studies, although not all of them have chosen the same path. Some of them continued with their studies at university, and some of them decided to just look for a job.

When consulted, some of the participants stated that their families' economic situation make them want to either quit, or go on with their studies. They think this is a vital aspect to consider. Some participants want to finish their studies to have better opportunities than their parents, although they state that some of them found themselves in the difficult position of helping their parents at home; so, eventually, they had to quit studying to look for a job. Otherwise, some of the participants had a better

family economic situation and could go to university and complete their formal education.

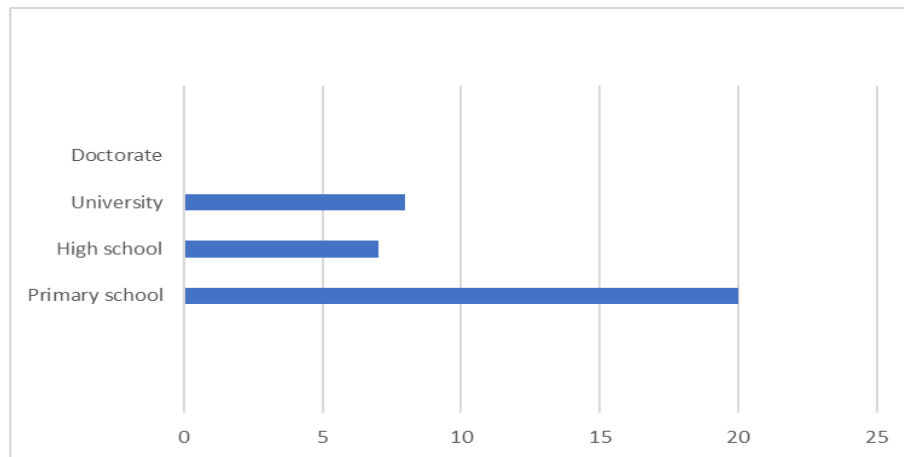
Among the participants there are not important differences in social classes. Almost all of them come working-class families.

Education level of the parents constitutes another key aspect to take into consideration because it indirectly affects the learning process and students' attitudes towards foreign languages. Generally, educated parents show interest in their children's academic achievements, which leads to a better performance in studies.



Graphic 2. Mother's educational level

It is noteworthy that there is the same number of mothers who attended university and mothers who just have a primary school diploma. Most of them attended high school and just one continued on to doctoral studies.



Graphic 3. Father's educational level

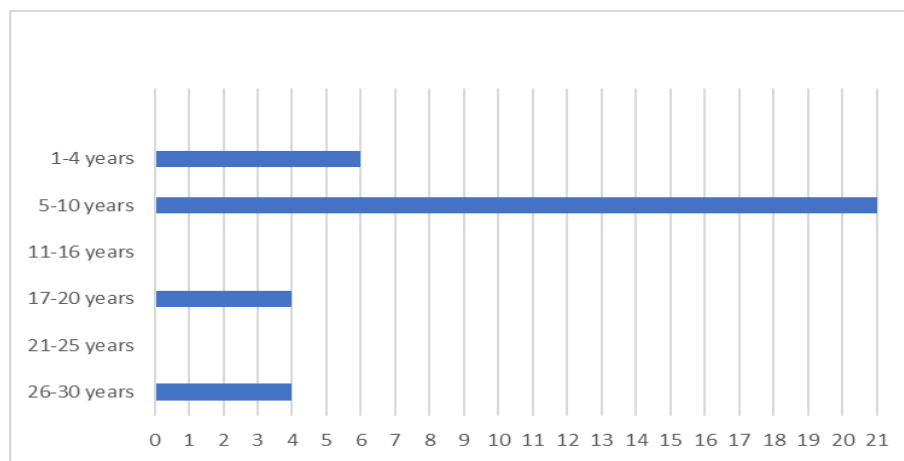
Most of the fathers have a primary school diploma. There seems to be a balance between the fathers who attended university and those who attended high school. None of the fathers have a doctorate.

...the high level educated parents are often interested and influential on the academic performance of their children. Children of educated parents are provided with better learning environment at home. To achieve their objectives facilities are provided to the children at home. The parents who do not go beyond elementary or secondary schools are not able to give proper help to their children in the educational problems. (Watson, 1986)

However, Hawkes (1995, quoted by Rana et al., 2015: 78) does not agree and states that “children's academic achievements in most cases do not necessarily depend on parents' education level”.

5.2 Linguistic background

The influence of the native language plays an important function in the way a person learns a foreign language. The exposure to a second language also influences the learner in their learning process. So, it is important to know the age of the participants when they began studying a second language.



Graph 4. Age at which students started learning English

In the graph above, we observe that most of the participants of this study began studying English between the ages of 5 and 10. There is a group that started to study the target language between 1 and 4, which means that they began to study English before their elementary school years.

Most of the participants (21) started to study English at primary school, from 5 years old, but it is quite significant that some participants (4) did not had any contact with English until the age of 26.

This situation can be beneficial for these students since, according to Sadeghi (2013:28), “children are in all aspects more efficient and effective second language learners than adults and adolescents”. But, as it has been discussed before, there are contradictory opinions about this issue.

6. Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to look into the several variables - internal and external - that affect the acquisition of a second language.

In order to obtain data for this research, a questionnaire was created based on the Attitude / Motivation Test Battery by Gardner (2004). The questionnaire consisted of 30 statements, all of which related to personal and social aspects, parental role and motivation.

This research study concludes that motivation is a fundamental factor in language learning. Participants agree that studying English is fundamental for their careers and also for getting a good job. They also acknowledge that the educational level of their parents is in some way connected to the learning process, although the results of the

questionnaire are conclusive given that just half of the participants agree that the educational level of their parents is connected to their own learning process.

Among the internal factors affecting second language learning, motivation needs to be highlighted as students want to learn English to get a good job or because they know the necessity of mastering English for their professional lives. Another internal factor that is closely related to motivation is attitude, since motivated students set an objective and try to achieve it for a particular personal reason. Finally, the role of the parents and their socio-economic status are among the external factors that affect second language learning.

6.1 Limitations and future directions

The study has some limitations. There could be some inaccuracies in the answers provided to the questionnaire, since the participants may not have given their real opinion.

The size of the sample is relatively small, so the results may not be applicable to other contexts. A bigger sample would improve the reliability of the study. However, the sample is heterogeneous.

6.2 Implications

This study may contribute to improving academic achievements. First, teachers need to be aware of the fact that students who come from families with low socio-economic status may not receive enough academic support from their parents. Some studies have shown that socio-economic factors influence academic achievement (Ryan, 2007).

As a second language teacher, it is important to adopt strategies to motivate the learners. If students feel that they are not going to need English in their lives they will not be motivated towards learning. As we have seen in the results of the questionnaire, participants wish to get a good job and read newspapers and magazines in another language and they need to know a second language for professional reasons.

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8. Appendix

Attitude / Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) by Gardner:

1. I wish I could speak many foreign languages perfectly
2. My parents try to help me to learn English.
3. I don't pay much attention to the feedback I receive in my English class.

4. I don't get anxious when I have to answer a question in my English class.
5. I look forward to going to class because my English teacher is so good.
6. Learning English is really great
7. If Japan had no contact with English-speaking countries, it would be a great loss.
8. Studying English is important because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak English.
9. I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.
10. My English class is really a waste of time.
11. I would get nervous if I had to speak English to a tourist.
12. Studying foreign languages is not enjoyable.
13. I make a point of trying to understand all the English I see and hear.
14. I don't think my English teacher is very good.
15. Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.
16. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class.
17. Knowing English isn't really an important goal in my life.
18. I hate English.

19. I feel very much at ease when I have to speak English.
20. I would rather spend more time in my English class and less in other classes.
21. I wish I could read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages.
22. My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.
23. I don't bother checking my assignments when I get them back from my English teacher.
24. I feel confident when asked to speak in my English class.
25. My English teacher is better than any of my other teachers.
26. I really enjoy learning English.
27. Most native English speakers are so friendly and easy to get along with, we are fortunate to have them as friends.
28. Studying English is important because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.
29. If it were up to me, I would spend all of my time learning English
30. I think my English class is boring.
31. Speaking English anywhere makes me feel worried.

- 32. I really have no interest in foreign languages.
- 33. I keep up to date with English by working on it almost every day.
- 34. The less I see of my English teacher, the better.
- 35. Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.
- 36. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our English class.
- 37. I sometimes daydream about dropping English.
- 38. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English.
- 39. It doesn't bother me at all to speak English.
- 40. I wish I could have many native English speaking friends.
- 41. I enjoy the activities of our English class much more than those of my other classes.
- 42. I would really like to learn many foreign languages.
- 43. My parents feel that I should continue studying English all through school
- 44. I put off my English homework as much as possible.
- 45. I am calm whenever I have to speak in my English class.
- 46. My English teacher has a dynamic and interesting teaching style.
- 47. English is a very important part of the school programme.

48. My parents have stressed the importance English will have for me when I leave school.

49. Native English speakers are very sociable and kind.

50. Studying English is important because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate the English way of life.

51. I want to learn English so well that it will become natural to me

52. To be honest, I really have little interest in my English class.

53. Native English speakers have much to be proud about because they have given the world much of value.

54. It would bother me if I had to speak English on the telephone.

55. It is not important for us to learn foreign languages.

56. When I have a problem understanding something in my English class, I always my teacher for help.

57. My parents urge me to seek help from my teacher if I am having problems with my English.

58. My English teacher is one of the least pleasant people I know.

59. Studying English is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.

60. It worries me that other students in my class seem to speak English better than I do.
61. I'm losing any desire I ever had to know English.
62. Learning English is a waste of time.
63. I would feel quite relaxed if I had to give street directions in English.
64. I like my English class so much, I look forward to studying more English in the future.
65. If I planned to stay in another country, I would try to learn their language.
66. My parents are very interested in everything I do in my English class.
67. I tend to give up and not pay attention when I don't understand my English teacher's explanation of something.
68. I don't understand why other students feel nervous about speaking English in class.
69. My English teacher is a great source of inspiration to me.
70. I plan to learn as much English as possible.
71. I would like to know more native English speakers.
72. Studying English is important because I will be able to interact more easily with speakers of English.
73. I would like to learn as much English as possible.

74. To be honest, I don't like my English class.
75. I would feel uncomfortable speaking English anywhere outside the classroom.
76. Most foreign languages sound crude and harsh.
77. I really work hard to learn English.
78. I would prefer to have a different English teacher.
79. Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English.
80. I get nervous when I am speaking in my English class.
81. To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English.
82. I think that learning English is dull
83. I would feel comfortable speaking English where both Japanese and English speakers were present.
84. I look forward to the time I spend in English class.
85. I enjoy meeting people who speak foreign languages.
86. My parents encourage me to practise my English as much as possible.
87. I can't be bothered trying to understand the more complex aspects of English.

88. Students who claim they get nervous in English classes are just making excuses.
89. I really like my English teacher.
90. I love learning English.
91. The more I get to know native English speakers, the more I like them.
92. I wish I were fluent in English.
93. I have a hard time thinking of anything positive about my English class.
94. I feel anxious if someone asks me something in English.
95. I would rather see a TV program dubbed into our language than in its own language with subtitles.
96. When I am studying English, I ignore distractions and pay attention to my task.
97. My English teacher doesn't present materials in an interesting way.
98. I am sometimes anxious that the other students in class will laugh at me when I speak English.
99. I haven't any great wish to learn more than the basics of English.
100. When I leave school, I will give up the study of English because I am not interested in it.

101. I would feel calm and sure of myself if I had to order a meal in English.

102. English is one of my favourite courses.

103. My parents think I should devote more time to studying English.

104. You can always trust native English speakers.