

Estableciendo rapport como técnica para motivar a un joven recluso a aprender inglés

Building rapport as a technique to motivate a young incarcerated to learn English

Miguel A. Patiño-Barrientos^a

Abstract:

Teaching prison inmates may seem very difficult as the context is quite unfamiliar to the majority of English as a foreign language teachers. There are even prejudices that can blind us. Being able to motivate this particular type of student to learn the language is, however, also part of our job and duty as educators. This study aims to analyse if building rapport with prisoners actually increases the motivation we try to encourage. It also aims to identify techniques that may be helpful for achieving the desired response from this type of student. In addition, I hope this work will motivate many other teachers to lose their fear of teaching a language beyond already familiar contexts, to dare to practice in contexts where prejudices abound. The data comprises 13 reflections, written after sixteen sessions. These were analysed for themes, and these were the grouped and coded under different labels or categories. The results suggest that establishing and building rapport with students whose learning and living context is a jail, can help to increase their attention and desire to learn more, and also to promote their active participation regarding to planning their learning.

Keywords:

motivation, rapport, teacher-student relationship

Resumen:

La enseñanza a reclusos puede parecer complicado debido a que este contexto es demasiado desconocido para la gran mayoría de maestros que enseñan inglés como idioma extranjero. Incluso existen prejuicios que nos ciegan. Motivarlos a aprender el idioma es parte de nuestro trabajo y deber como educadores. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar si el desarrollo de rapport con ellos engrosa efectivamente la motivación que tratamos de estimular. Este trabajo igualmente busca identificar técnicas que pudieran ser de ayuda para alcanzar la respuesta esperada de nuestros alumnos. Así mismo, espero este trabajo logre motivar a otros maestros para perder el miedo a llevar la enseñanza de una lengua más allá de los contextos ya conocidos, a contextos que les son atribuidos falsos prejuicios. Para llegar a la recolección de datos, se analizan 13 reflexiones escritas después de dieciséis sesiones. Éstas son analizadas basadas en un proceso de coding, dándoles así una etiqueta o categoría. Respecto a los resultados, estos apuntan a que el construir y establecer rapport con nuestros alumnos cuyo contexto es el de la cárcel, ayuda a incrementar su atención y deseo de aprender más, así como promover su activa participación en decisiones de planeación.

Palabras Clave:

motivación, rapport, relación maestro-alumno

Introduction

Motivating a prison inmate to learn by building rapport may seem quite difficult as there are prejudices out there claiming that incarcerated students are as dangerous as if they were free. These misconceptions have perhaps brought us to fear teaching outside our comfort zone in this type of context. Nevertheless, I believe all people deserve an education. As English teachers, it may not be our duty to let students know they are not alone since we are not

psychologists and it may be a complex commitment. Nevertheless, I strongly hold that all of us are humans and need to share love and kindness. The purpose of this research is to investigate first, whether an English teacher can motivate prisoners to learn the foreign language by building rapport and, second, to identify and share any techniques which can be effectively used to do so. As I was the participant in this research and I wanted to collect data which could enable me to analyze how this teacher-inmate student relationship would evolve, during

^a Miguel Angel Patiño Barrientos, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2237-0550>, Email: mapb100@hotmail.com

Fecha de recepción: 23/08/2022, Fecha de aceptación: 06/09/2022, Fecha de publicación: 05/11/2022



the course, I decided to follow a case study approach, in order to inquire how it evolved. To gather my data, I wrote reflections after every class on how the class went. I then used codings to arrange and analyse the data.

This report begins by highlighting the current situation which jails for teenagers are experiencing in Mexico. I go on to define “motivation” and “rapport”, and how we can increase those by developing specific teaching and learning strategies. Later, I describe the methodology used for this research and how it fits my needs. Finally, I discuss my findings and analyse them to see whether they answer my question or not.

According to a study conducted by Azaola (2014), 28% of more than fourteen thousand incarcerated teenagers in the states of Hidalgo, Coahuila, Sinaloa, and Morelos, Mexico, felt that they would have no opportunities in the future; 45% believed they would be living in a worse situation when released, than when they were first put in prison.

As English teachers, we may not be the most influential people in their lives. However, in some cases, we teachers are the only contact with the outside world that these incarcerated teenagers have for long periods of time. As Azaola (2007) states, many convicts do not receive any visits at all for a while; then, perhaps, a couple of times every month. Some reasons she suggested for this included that their visitors were asked to pay to be let in, to take new clothes or even food to prison inmates.

In relation to foreign language learning, Nunan (1991) finds motivation to be the main feature in successful learning. He also mentions the strong interest he had in Japanese culture when learning their language. Following Nunan’s experience, it can be seen that motivation plays an important role when getting a new language. But, when being incarcerated, with absolutely no direct contact with the English language (as is the case in this research), where can teen convicts get the motivation needed for successfully acquiring a language?

Literature review

The current situation of jails in Mexico

“Being sent to jail is the most severe punishment that can be given to a person” (México Evalúa, 2013, p. 8). It implies a restriction of freedom and almost every right related to being free. In Mexico, by 2016, there were more than 242 thousand inmates in the system. What is the purpose? Are they actually being rehabilitated in order to be included in society again?

The main purpose of jails, supposedly, is to prevent recidivism and to rehabilitate for reinsertion into society. The first refers to “protecting” society from further felonies. The second seeks reorientation and reeducation, so that when prisoners are released, they will not commit further crimes.

Nevertheless, jails in Mexico, rather than helping prisoners, sometimes treat prisoners extremely badly. As cited in *Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* [LiMedDH] (2015, para. 5):

The National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) reported 7,741 complaints of torture between 2010 and 2014. In 2014, there were more than 2,400 complaints, double the amount of the previous year. A report published by Amnesty International in October 2015 states that in 2014 there were 10,400 complaints of mistreatment or torture.

Current situation in Mexican jails for minors

Mexican jails for teenagers represent an alarming phenomenon that the rest of society tends to ignore. According to the LiMedDH (2015), there are around 60 detention centers for young lawbreakers. Up to 2014, there were more than 13,300 juveniles at these places. Among them, 9,828 young people received an alternative sentence, and 3,761 were held at a detention center. The majority are young men, with only 6% of the population comprising young women.

These brief pieces of information portray a disturbing reality in which our country finds itself. Little do we actually know about this. Have we ever asked ourselves anything at all about the current situation of juvenile courts and prisons in Mexico?

The previously cited report claims that minors can be incarcerated from the age of fourteen years old, on the condition that the crime committed is considered serious, such as murder, kidnapping, etc. In the same report, UNICEF (as cited in LiMedDH, 2015) communicates that half of the minors are between 17 and 18 years old.

Azaola (2015) points out that, every year, more than four thousand teenagers are deprived of their freedom after committing a felony with sentences ranging from one to 15 or even 20 years, in the most serious cases. In her study, she finds that “28% of the minors interviewed do not have any dreams, do not trust anyone, and do not even want to think about their future”.

These thoughts reflect a lack of motivation in their view of their own lives, once they leave the juvenile reform centre. What are they going to do? Will they commit the same

mistakes? Why are they having those thoughts? Isn't it one of the purposes of jails to reincorporate lawbreakers into society?

Although a relatively high percentage of prisoners says that they do not know what they will do, an even higher one expresses their feelings about helping at home, having a family of their own, getting a job, and even studying for a profession.

As teachers, should we not encourage those thoughts, so that the learners feel brave enough to conquer the world when they are released and feel they can do whatever they want to achieve? Some may say we are simply English teachers, but I say we can become far more than that.

The real power of motivation

Palacios (2015), in her article for the BBC, describes some successful cases in which ex-convicts deal with the adversities while being in jail and how, once they get their freedom back, continue to do well in their daily lives.

There is, for example, the case of Jorge Cueto-Felgueroso, who was charged with fraud. During his eleven months in jail, somehow, he figured out how to survive his time there. He came up with the idea of designing patterns on leather. Once he left jail, he got involved in the business of selling leather bags and wallets, which are still made by inmates today. Being happy with this new life, he says his motivation relies on knowing he is providing decent work to his, back-then, prison mates.

Another case is the creation of a drama group, which became the first professional theater company to operate inside a Mexican prison. Prisoners may make some money from this activity, but for them, the theater group is much more. Marta, now an ex-convict, says: *"the social enterprise project is much more than a source of employment; it is "a lifetime chance" for inmates to escape the "black hole" of prison"*.

A leather-goods business and an art project have helped these people overcome some of the issues in their previous lives, giving them a new chance to live more normally, as rehabilitated members of society.

How can our teen inmates benefit from learning English? By making them aware of the advantages that being able to speak English can have, once they are released from jail.

Motivation

I have mentioned the word "motivation" several times, but I have not yet provided a proper definition. Crookes and Schmidt (as cited in Alizadeh, 2016) define motivation as an orientation that learners have towards the goal (in this case, of learning the language). Pardee (as cited in

Alizadeh, 2016) says that "a motive is what encourages the person to act in a certain way or develop an inclination for particular behaviour".

According to Harmer (2007), motivation is that energy that pushes us to accomplish what we want to achieve. Many theories on how to categorize motivation have been proposed in our field, such as that of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Brown (2001) suggests that intrinsic motivation is the internal feeling that there are rewarding consequences in doing the activity. There is no material compensation, but the activity itself is a reward in itself. Intrinsic motivation has to do with the interior desires of an individual.

On the other hand, Brown (2007, p. 76) defines extrinsic motivation as the feeling of knowing that there will be "a reward from the outside and beyond the self". It means that the learner receives an external acknowledgment, such as money, prizes, grades, etc.

The motivation angel

Harmer (2007) develops an interesting discussion on the topic of motivation. He describes a metaphor of a statue that resembles an angel with its open wings. But, before flying, extrinsic motivation needs to be built under the angel. He differentiates between five stages: affect, achievement, attitudes, activities, and agency.

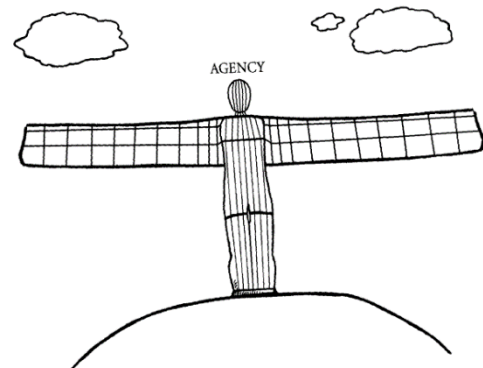


Figure 1. Motivation angel. (Harmer, 2007, p. 104)

These stages are helpful for teachers, if we want our students to be motivated and to feel successful. If they are combined progressively, as suggested, the result may be effective participation of the learners in the class as well as in their own learning process. Of course, the existence of these stages does not guarantee the students will perfectly learn if they are fostered. Learners have different personalities and also other cultural factors may affect the learning process.

The first step to be followed is that of developing a genuinely interested and caring relationship with students

as a group and as individuals. Building a connection with our students can increase their attention and motivation, because they feel heard and taken into consideration as human beings, beyond the purely academic objectives.

As a second step, we teachers need to help learners taste what achievement is, and praise their efforts, as this provokes in them a feeling of success. However, Harmer (2007) recommends to provide them with chances to demonstrate their effort. Giving them challenges would be suitable for them. If activities are easy, it may lead to learners feeling demotivated. If activities are hard, students may feel unable to do more.

Then, there is the teacher's attitude. This involves being sure of what we are doing as experts in our field. If a student sees us motivated, calm, confident of our actions, they are to feel secure that our sessions are meticulously planned for them to enjoy.

Activities play an important role here. Since the learners are the ones acquiring the language, tasks are meant to be appealing and exciting for them to carry out and complete, while they are learning and practicing on the way.

Finally, agency involves letting learners know that they are responsible for their own learning process, as much as we teachers are. Giving them the opportunity to make decisions will stimulate in them a sense of responsibility and maturity that will increase their motivation.

All these stages together, according to Harmer (op. cit.) construct an angel who is ready to fly, inspired and motivated by actions that prepared them to wave their wings once there were in position to dash.

Rapport

Working according to the previous definitions, and aiming to develop the desired environment for motivating the students, establishing an appropriate relationship with our students is mandatory. Building a friendly teacher-student rapport is useful and positive. Harmer (2007, p. 113) defines rapport as "the relationship that students have with the teacher and vice versa". Brown (2001, p. 202) interprets it as "the relationship or connection you establish with your students, a relationship built on trust and respect that leads to students feeling capable, competent, and creative."

It means not only the academic relationship in the classroom, but the trust we have in each other as people. Building this tie, helps our students feel satisfied to be in

the class, participate, and not be afraid of making mistakes.

Establishing and maintaining rapport

Effective rapport depends on the way in which the teacher interacts with the students. Brown (2001, p. 203) outlines some ways to build rapport:

- *showing interest in each student as a person*
- *giving feedback on each person's progress*
- *openly soliciting students' ideas and feelings*
- *valuing and respecting what students think and say*
- *developing a genuine sense of vicarious joy when they learn something or otherwise succeed.*
- *laughing with them, not at them.*

Harmer (2007) also suggests four key characteristics: listening to students, recognising students, respecting students, and being even-handed.

Listening to students, as Harmer states, means not only listening to what they say when participating but also to their concerns and opinions, even outside the classroom. We have to show real interest in what they have to say. Listening to their comments on how they see our class, and our teaching is important, too. Not only do we have to listen through our ears, but also through our eyes. Eye contact is also a way to approach them and look interested.

When we recognise our students, we let them know that we remember much more than only their names. As Harmer (2007) says, knowing our students goes beyond that being familiar on how to call them. It is for sure that we teachers will be aware of their situation and especially that we may understand them. They will be pleased to know that their teacher remembers them.

Teachers must be aware of how they treat students. Harmer (2007) suggests educators to avoid reacting with anger and especially, evade to ridicule students. Respect is a relevant component of any health social relationship. In our classroom, what we should do, is to keep that respect undamaged.

Finally, teachers must be even-handed. Most teachers tend to have some preferred students based on their skills, their tendency to participate, or even just on their attitude. However, we have to consider all the group with the same importance. How will the student who never speaks feel if the teacher does not pay to him or her? A professional teacher must treat all learners equally.

Methodology

Worldview and research design

For this research, as I was dealing with marginalized individuals, and the information regarding their backgrounds and current context was limited and unreliable, I followed a constructivist worldview in order to better understand the situation in which inmates live. Regarding this research philosophy, Creswell (2014, p. 37) highlights "The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied". He also adds that the interpretation flows from our own personal experiences. I settled on this research based on the fact that I was immersed in the context, trying to understand and analyse my own practice there.

The research design chosen for this inquiry was case study, as Creswell (2014) defines it as a design in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case. For this one, specifically, I analysed my own teaching experience. Case study was also helpful due to the way in which information was gathered. This, was carried out by writing reflections after some sessions. As this was a case study, analysing my own thoughts and ideas through my written reflections helped me gather the information I required.

Participants

The only participant in this study was I myself. Back then, I was a 21-year-old man. I worked at the "Centro de Internamiento para Adolescentes de Hidalgo" every Thursday from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. for sixteen weeks. I would teach two students from the beginning of the course. Nevertheless, during week 4, one of my inmate students was released, so for the rest of the course, I was in charge of only one student. To protect his anonymity, I gave my student a name in this research paper, which is Braulio. At some other moments, I mention a couple more inmate students whose names I have also changed.

Setting

The prison is equipped with four large classrooms and five garden sets which were outside in the courtyard. As I was not the only teacher there at the time, there were not enough rooms for all of us. I gave the lessons outside in the courtyard. There were around 10 more teachers teaching from two to three students each. Nevertheless, I focused my research on my own activities, as I had no chance to observe anyone else.

Although I would have liked to collect information from the other inmates who were being taught, I was not allowed to, due to the policies of the institution and I did not have permission to do so, because they are teenagers and

consent has to be granted by their parents or guardians who were not accessible to me.

Instruments

My main data sources were my own reflections, which I wrote after every session. Selener (as cited in Vaccarino, Comrie, Murray & Sligo, 2007) shares that reflections are tools for promoting actions. These reflections were very useful because they helped me to identify some positive decisions that I was making throughout the course to encourage my students to learn English.

Sankar, Bailey, and Williams (as cited in Vaccarino et al., 2007) point out that reflections are a form of analysis that explore how and why things happen. Every Thursday after class, I would write my reflections on what had happened during the hour we were teaching. Two main questions had to be answered:

How would you evaluate your instructions?

How did you feel about the experience today and what did you learn?

At the end of the sixteen weeks, thirteen reflections had been written by the participant.

Data analysis

To analyse the data, I first organized it by using a coding system. Smith and Davies (as cited in Theron, 2015) argues that coding is a method to organise the data so that underlying messages portrayed by the data may become clearer to the researcher. Theron (2015, p. 4) defines a code as "a descriptive construct designed by the researcher to capture the primary content or essence of the data". It means highlighting significant words that may sum up the message in a sentence. As my research questions focus on motivation, I looked for information that had to do with that topic in every reflection. I grouped them into several meaningful labels and patterns. I read my reflections several times in order not to miss anything. Once this process had been carried out, I looked for commonalities and differences, and the final list of codes emerged.

Findings and discussion

The findings are based on the coding process from the weekly reflections written after every class, and an analysis and interpretation of data collected under each category. The data was divided into 6 categories for analysis. Nevertheless, the first category is divided into sub-themes. My findings suggest that I, in fact, had built some degree of rapport with my student after five weeks of teaching. What I did was listen to what he wanted to say

or share. I start by discussing Category 1: Showing interest. This was the main way in which I approached the lessons. I also praised him, planned classes based on his interests, and showed my enthusiasm whenever he was right.

Showing interest

Showing interest, in fact, became the most frequently used technique during this course. As previously stated, Harmer (2007) and Brown (2001) both highlight the importance of letting students know the teacher cares about them, not only academically, but also personally. As I already pointed out, being in jail means being away from society, set apart from real communication with people outside. I was, in fact, the only direct contact my student had with the outside world.

My student had many things to say when I was there every Thursday, and I would listen to him and show real interest, in what he had to say to me. In order to analyse this finding, I found that I showed interest by paying attention to his likes and dislikes, his personal issues, his academic studies, and about his family.

Likes and dislikes

As any other person, my student has likes and dislikes. The first thing I did when I began the first class was to ask the two students what they liked and what they did not, as stated in the reflection below.

I asked them about the things they enjoy doing or watching. I found myself extremely surprised to know they like some things in common. I did not show my surprising emotions so I would not look like a fool believing inmates are different to some extent (Ref #1).

The above extract exemplifies how surprised I was at the beginning of the course. Little do we know about the situation they live in. Sometimes we believe they are terrible human beings and that they deserve the worst, when, in fact, they are just like any other person. As already mentioned, looking natural is an important factor when working with motivation as it lets my students know that I am confident about my job.

In further sessions, when trust had already been built up, Braulio would chat about things he could see in the activities we used to do in class. On one occasion, I asked them to draw themselves:

He draw (sic) himself with a strong body, and it reminded me of how he had told me he enjoys doing exercise. I showed more interest in asking them if they do the same. Daniel told me he exercises once in a while; Rodrigo never does. Even Braulio shared with me some techniques to have a strong body as I told him I wanted to start doing exercise (Ref #12).

As Harmer (2007) suggests, the stage of “affect”, part of his model “the motivation angel”, is illustrated in this extract, as I showed interest in the things Braulio liked,

which definitely improved the relationship teacher-student we had. And this extract exemplifies how I worked with this aspect, throughout the course.

Personal issues

Building a relationship with a prison inmate student may seem difficult to achieve, because it is important to remember that this research took place in an unusual context. However, his life story was something he shared with me in the fifth week and I did not stop him. He just talked and said what he wanted to say.

We started talking about being in jail, before, during, and what he plans to do when leaving. (...) He told me more of what he plans for his future and I encouraged him not to give up. He shared with me that he will leave the prison in less than a year (Ref #5).

As noted above, not only did I use to motivate him to learn the language during the course, but I also encouraged him to “follow his gut feeling” about his future. As I already stated in my introduction, we English teachers may not be the most influential people in our students’ lives. Nevertheless, it is our job and duty to encourage future generations to become whatever they want to be. In the following reflection, I make evident my feelings about my experience.

He shared with me his life story, not all of it, but he did say many personal things about his life before being in jail. I dare to say this has been my favorite session so far as I got to know the real Braulio. I think our relationship teacher-student is becoming stronger as I understand more about him (Ref #5).

This entry reflects what I felt during the rest of the course. I felt I was not there in a “mandatory” capacity. I knew I was there because I liked it. It was during week 5 that I realized I had achieved rapport. And I also felt content because I knew my student was confident enough to trust me and share his past experiences. During the following sessions, he kept telling me more personal stories and not only did he share with me his past, but his plans for the future. He did this also during weeks 7, 9, and 10.

Academic studies

During one class, he shared that he is currently studying for a technical degree in design. As I wanted to show my interest, I asked him more about it. Brown (2001) recommends showing a real interest in our students’ lives but beyond the classroom, as I wrote in the following reflection:

My activity was about drawing some things on the boards I brought. Then we would say: “In my board, there are two drawings” and so on. Nevertheless, Braulio draw (sic) only one thing: a big winged heart. I asked him if he likes drawing to what he answered he is studying a technical degree on design. I found that very interesting and asked more about it. As we were talking about designs, he described some of the things he can do as designer (Ref #7).

When I asked him more about his technical degree, he explained to me many of the things he is capable of doing. I showed my enthusiasm and by looking at his gestures when talking, I could see that he was, in fact, excited to share with me what he can do.

Family

Being away from home may be quite difficult as you are not next to the people you grew up with and those who know you more than anyone else. As a prison inmate, it must be extremely hard. Confined in jail, away from your home leads to missing people you care about. My student told me some stories about his family during weeks 5 and 9. However, I particularly noticed strong feelings, during week 7. The week before that, I had been sick, and I was unable to give him his class. A week later, he told me his mom had visited him that day. I showed interest and asked more about it.

He told me that sometimes his nieces visit him. And that he would like to give them something in English to impress them. I proposed teaching him how to write letters so he can make some to his family. He seemed very excited about the idea of doing it (Ref #7).

From that point on, I used to ask him how his family was, if they were fine and if he had told them about his English classes. He told me his mom is the one who visits him, usually. This reflection helped me not only to understand more about him, but also to plan classes for him based on what he asked me to.

Planning based on his interests

In order to show that I, in fact, was listening to what he was telling me, I used to plan activities based on what he wanted. As Harmer (2007) suggests in his angel metaphor the stage of “agency”, in which students are given the chance to decide and make decisions about the classes during the course, I made him feel part of the course itself, not only as a “passive” student, but as a learner who knows what he wants.

During the first weeks, before having built rapport with him, he would only ask for some phrases and words he wanted to know in English.

During today's lesson, I learned more about Braulio. He is quite interested in learning the language. He is always asking vocabulary and how to say some expressions (Ref #3).

As I wanted him to be more interested in the language, I would let him ask me whatever he wanted to know in English. In further sessions, more specific vocabulary was demanded by him.

I wanted to finish my topic, but he asked me to tell him some words in English. The rest of the class was about translating words he wanted to know. At one point, he asked me how to call

some family members. The most important for him was the word “niece” as he has two (Ref #7)

The extracts above exemplify how his doubts about words he wanted to know went from the general to more specific ones as he told me more about his family. In reference #3 he had not spoken about his life before coming to jail. At one point, I suggested teaching him how to write a letter, so he could impress his family. When the class started, I found myself excited to see his response to the task.

He wrote his letter to his mom. He seemed very excited and was always asking for phrases that he could say to his mom, like saying “I love you”, “I miss you”, or “thank you for all the support”. After finishing the letter, he said his mom was going to visit him today. He wanted to write his letter again, but on a cleanner (sic) sheet of paper, so he could deliver it to her (Ref #9).

This reflection has been one of my favorites since it reflects how my student was doing the activities I planned based on what he would like to do with the language. This extract made me feel proud of my job and proud of my student, who I could see evolving every week as our rapport grows stronger after each class. Harmer (2007) in his “motivation angel” suggests one stage “activities”. According to this view, activities should be interesting and should engage students’ attention. Writing the letter encouraged Braulio to use the language as it was something he could give to his mom.

Praising

Praising is probably the most widely used technique when motivating a student. During my time teaching at the Centro de Internamiento, I would praise my student’s correct answers every time he got something right.

Even though Braulio did not have Beto's support for understanding what I said, he made the effort for getting whatever he could from my words. I encouraged him through motivational phrases every time he would understand something (Ref #3).

As exemplified above, I used to recognise his correct responses to the tasks. Some phrases I applied to support this technique, were *bien hecho*, *perfecto*, and *así es*. As the course advanced, I would use the same phrases but in English (well done, perfect, that’s right). These phrases as suggested by Dörnyei (as cited in Xiao, 2013) were helpful and increased my student’s self-confidence as he would participate more often and his responses would be fast:

I wanted him to write the name of the numbers next to the numbers themselves. He did it very fast. He told me he had studied the numbers since the last time we saw each other. I congratulated him by recognizing his fast response to the task (Ref #7).

That activity was, somehow, for him to practice something I knew he had mastered, to some extent. Of course, I did not tell him the activity was for him to recall the numbers. Again, in this case I tried to give him an experience of success, which Dörnyei (as cited in Xiao, 2013) highlights as an important factor in motivating learners.

The results have shown that building rapport with my prison inmate student allowed me to motivate him to learn the language. Showing interest and praising became my main allies in this teaching experience as I built that rapport. Listening to what he had to say and, somehow, letting him know I was interested in what he was saying, increased our teacher- student relationship. Praising and showing enthusiasm for his responses were carried out as naturally as possible so it would not look false. This section aimed to present and critically discuss my findings. In the following section, I give my final thoughts on the experience.

Conclusion

Teaching at the Centro de Internamiento para Adolescentes de Hidalgo has given me a broader view of what teaching means. When we train to be English teachers, we probably believe we will be teachers at the most “normal” school in the world. Nevertheless, we can learn a great deal by being open to other contexts. At the beginning of the research, I was very nervous as I had heard different stories about the place where I was going to be teaching. Prejudices blind us all. We should not forget that, in spite of the fact that prison inmates are there for a reason, they are still people. Human beings. Just like us.

To give them more enjoyable teaching and motivate at the same time, I have shown through my own teaching and reflection on that teaching, that building rapport increases the way in which our students are encouraged to acquire the language. Showing interest and listening to what they have to say, in fact, increases confidence and motivates the students. Taking them and their own interests into account in lesson planning and recognising their effort also pushes them to become more actively involved in the learning process. This experience has also opened my eyes to see beyond, to realise that, even though, as I have stated at the beginning of this paper, English teachers may not be the most influential people in their lives, it is true we are somehow something different in their days.

I am happy for having taught Braulio during that time. I am also content to have known Beto (the inmate who was freed after a few weeks I started my research), Diego and Daniel (these last two since their teacher could not arrive that day). But I am more grateful for having received from them, too; not only the experience, but their time, their stories, their attention, and most importantly, their humanity. I am thankful and I hope this research can help other English teachers to open themselves to building rapport as a technique to motivate an incarcerated student.

I recommend teacher to start considering and implementing the “motivation angel model” designed by Harmer (2007) since it has helped and guided me to increase my students motivation towards learning the language.

As for future research, there are some points that may be considered:

- To study the most suitable teaching methodology for inmate students who are being “educated” to be reinstated in society.
- To study a bigger sample size in order to have more reliable information.
- To get permission to analyse inmate’s reflections, to see not only teachers’ responses, but also learners’.

Referencias

- [1] Alizadeh, M. (2016). The impact of motivation on English language learning. Retrieved from <http://ijreeonline.com/article-1-23-en.pdf>
- [2] Azaola, E. (2007). Las condiciones de vida en las cárceles mexicanas. *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, 49(200), 87-97
- [3] Azaola, E. (2015). Diagnóstico de las y los adolescentes que cometen delitos graves en México. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/mexico/spanish/Diagnostico_adolescentes_web.pdf
- [4] Azaola, E.: Youth incarceration in Mexico [Brochure]. (2014). Retrieved from https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Youth_Incarceration_in_Mexico.pdf
- [5] Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. (2nd ed.). NY: Longman.
- [6] Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- [7] Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. (4th ed.). England: Longman.
- [8] Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos. (2015). Prison population. Retrieved from: <https://www.prison-insider.com/countryprofile/prisonsofmexico?s=la-population-carcerale#la-population-carcerale>
- [9] México Evalúa. (2013). La cárcel en México: ¿para qué? Retrieved from https://www.mexicoevalua.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MEX-EVA_INDX-CARCEL-MEXICO_10142013.pdf
- [10] Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology: A text book for teachers*. Prentice-hall international edition
- [11] Palacios, E. (2015, November 26). Behind bars: The firms offering hope to Mexican prisoners. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-34897955>
- [12] Theron, P.M. (2015). Coding and data analysis during qualitative empirical research in Practical Theology. In *die Skriflig*, 49(3), 1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i3.1880>
- [13] Vaccarino, F., Comrie, M., Murray, N., & Sligo, F. (2007). *Action research reflections: The wanganui adult literacy and employment project*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Massey University
- [14] Xiao, F. (2013). Motivational strategies in teaching English as a foreign language: applying motivation plan in TEFL. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(18), 257-262