

**MAKING THEM TALK: EXAMINING STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO
COMMUNICATE IN AN EMI CLASS ENVIRONMENT THROUGH INSTRUMENTAL
MOTIVATION**

**HACERLOS HABLAR: EXAMINAR LA DISPOSICIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES
PARA COMUNICARSE EN UN AMBIENTE DE CLASE EMI A TRAVÉS DE LA
MOTIVACIÓN INSTRUMENTAL**

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach that emphasizes an active interaction in the classroom, including the practice of productive skills like interactive speaking, a skill that is particularly important in EMI classes. In this paper, we evaluated the effect of a continuous evaluation system based on receiving points for speaking in the second language in class, which offered a more instrumental motivation, and its relationship to students' perceived willingness to communicate (WTC) in affective, cognitive and behavioral components. **Methodology.** Once the points system was in place, it

was used to encourage students to improve their fluency by participating in class in English, avoiding Spanish. When the course finished, a questionnaire examined their perceptions of the system and how it affected their English use in class. **Results.** Our results indicated a high percentage of students, 81%, who evaluated the system positively overall and who would want to continue it in the future, though lower levels of agreement were seen when looking at comfort and enjoyment. Finally, the qualitative results echo this data while offering more nuance on how the system affects students WTC. **Conclusions:** We conclude that the system was positive for students' perceptions of their WTC, despite it being an instrumental motivation that looks toward a more extrinsic orientation. **Originality.** Our work explores the value of a positive reinforcement system that can push students to be more active about their foreign language use in class and explores an understudied area in foreign language teaching, instrumental motivation to improve students' willingness to communicate.

KEYWORDS: Communicative language teaching (CLT); Willingness to communicate (WTC); English as a second language

RESUMEN

Objetivo: La enseñanza comunicativa del lenguaje (CLT) es un enfoque que enfatiza una interacción activa en el aula, incluida la práctica de habilidades productivas como el habla interactiva, una habilidad que es particularmente importante en las clases de EMI. En este trabajo evaluamos el efecto de un sistema de evaluación continua basado en la obtención de puntos por hablar en la segunda lengua en clase, que ofrecía una motivación más instrumental, y su relación con la disposición percibida para comunicarse (WTC) de los estudiantes en los aspectos afectivo, cognitivo y componentes conductuales. **Metodología.** Una vez que se implementó el sistema de puntos, se utilizó para alentar a los estudiantes a mejorar su fluidez participando en clase en inglés, evitando el español. Cuando terminó el curso, un cuestionario examinó sus percepciones del sistema y cómo afectó su uso del inglés en clase. **Resultados.** Nuestros resultados indicaron un alto porcentaje de estudiantes, 81%, que evaluaron positivamente el sistema en general y que querían continuarlo en el futuro, aunque se observaron niveles más bajos de acuerdo en cuanto a la comodidad y el disfrute. Finalmente, los resultados cualitativos hacen eco de estos datos al tiempo que ofrecen más matices sobre cómo el sistema afecta a los estudiantes de WTC. **Conclusiones:** Concluimos que el sistema fue positivo para las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre su WTC, a pesar de ser una motivación instrumental que mira hacia una orientación más extrínseca. **Originalidad.** Nuestro trabajo explora el valor de un sistema de refuerzo positivo que puede empujar a los estudiantes a ser más activos en el uso de la lengua extranjera en clase y explora un área poco estudiada en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, la motivación instrumental para mejorar la disposición de los estudiantes a comunicarse.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enseñanza comunicativa de lenguas (CLT); Voluntad de comunicarse (WTC); Inglés como segundo lenguaje

INTRODUCTION

Authentic communication is at the heart of communicative language teaching (CLT), which focuses on students' productive skills, in particular oral skills, yet sometimes actually getting students to talk, and continue, in their second language (L2) is difficult. What is effective in truly pushing students to use their foreign language in class? Specific types of language learning motivation, such as integrative or

instrumental (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) have been shown to predict long-term language learning success or persistence, yet they may also be important to *students' classroom behavior, such as showing why students choose to interact and engage in the L2 when they do. This becomes particularly important in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), which refers to "The use of the **English language to teach academic subjects** in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English"* (Dearden, 2014), since such classes require that students actively use English to study curricular content, where the foreign language is both the vehicle for communication as well as one of the skills being worked upon, as it is used for class discussions, project work, etc.

One of the goals of second/foreign language educationist to “engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness to communicate in them” (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998, p. 54). This willingness was termed willingness to communicate (WTC) by MacIntyre (1998; 2007), who established a model for WTC with 6 layers of variables associated with students’ willingness to speak in the L2, including personality, L2 self-confidence, social situation, intergroup motivation, interpersonal motivation, among others. Numerous studies have used this model, and found interesting results, such as WTC being determined by how secure students feel with their classmates (Kang, 2005), how familiar a situation in class may be (Barjesteh, Vaseghi & Neissi, 2012), how factors in the classroom environment directly impact attitudes and communication confidence (Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Hosseini Fatemi, & Choi, 2016) or how perceived communicative competence is related to WTC (Elahi Shirvan, Khajavy, & MacIntyre, 2019). Other variables shown to have an effect in students’ WTC in EFL environments include the effect of task types, topics, the interlocutor, the teacher’s role, and the classroom atmosphere (Kang, 2005; Peng 2014). Research has indicated that students’ perceptions and beliefs point to the class environment as one of the factors most often mentioned that influences their willingness to speak in class (House, 2004; Cao, 2009; Xie, 2011), yet situational factors in language class environments are also understudied, as Javad & Rahimi note (2018). In particular, no research to our knowledge has been done on assessment or evaluation methods which are tied to students’ speaking in class, and how this affects their perceptions of WTC. This would represent a more instrumental or extrinsic force on students’ WTC, which has traditionally not be associated with language learning success like its integrative counterpart, and which is also understudied.

The present pilot study addresses this gap in WTC and instrumental motivation research by examining the effect of a points-based evaluation system for class speaking in L2 and its relationship to students’ perceived WTC in English, in three dimensions: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. We examine this motivation through the situational context of a specific classroom setting: English use in a bilingual undergraduate program at a public Spanish university (3rd year). Results will show how a more instrumental motivation, concretely, gaining points that help in their final evaluation at the end of the course, influences students’ willingness to communicate in their L2.

METHODOLOGY

Our objective was to examine the effect of an evaluation system based on receiving points for speaking in the L2 in class and its relationship to students' perceived WTC (affective, cognitive and behavioral components).

Study context and population

This pilot study was undertaken in an undergraduate course at a public university in Spain with education majors in their third year of study in a bilingual track degree in primary education, where students take 50% of their core curriculum classes in English, what is often termed an EMI program. Despite it being a bilingual degree that students voluntarily opt into, it has proven difficult to get students to use their spoken English in class, where improved fluency is a concern (Author, in press). In this sense, accuracy was not a goal, and the quality of students' English was not considered, only if they used English the majority of the class time (avoiding Spanish). The class had 31 students, where 21 students ultimately answered a voluntary questionnaire about the points system.

Study structure

Students took part in a points system where, for every seminar class in which they spoke English the majority of the time, they received one point. A total number of points were calculated corresponding to the number of total seminars to be taught after the system was in place, which were 15 seminars. It was students' goal to get as many points as possible out of 15. Seminars are smaller classes where students can more easily be heard and observed. Students' spoken language was monitored in class by the teacher, who made a note each time she heard the student using Spanish, and also of when she heard students actively using English. When class began and English was expected, a sign was posted reading ENGLISH ONLY, which was taken down when the observable period ended in case students needed to review or clarify doubts in Spanish. Students could have up to two observed uses of Spanish before they lost half a point, and then after another observed use of Spanish, they lost the entire point for that session. Points could not be made-up at a later date. As long as students did not use Spanish more than two times and also were observed actively using English, they could receive a whole point for that session. These points accumulated in a prize which amounted to giving them more choice in their final exam essay questions. This prize was staggered, so that there were several different choice possibilities for getting 80% or more of the points, or 50-79% of the points available. Once the course had ended, the quantitative questionnaire was issued to students in their native language, Spanish, who took it voluntarily and anonymously. The method for this research is triangulated, including a quantitative phase with the Likert item, self-report questionnaire and qualitative data from open-ended questions which occurred at the end of the questionnaire.

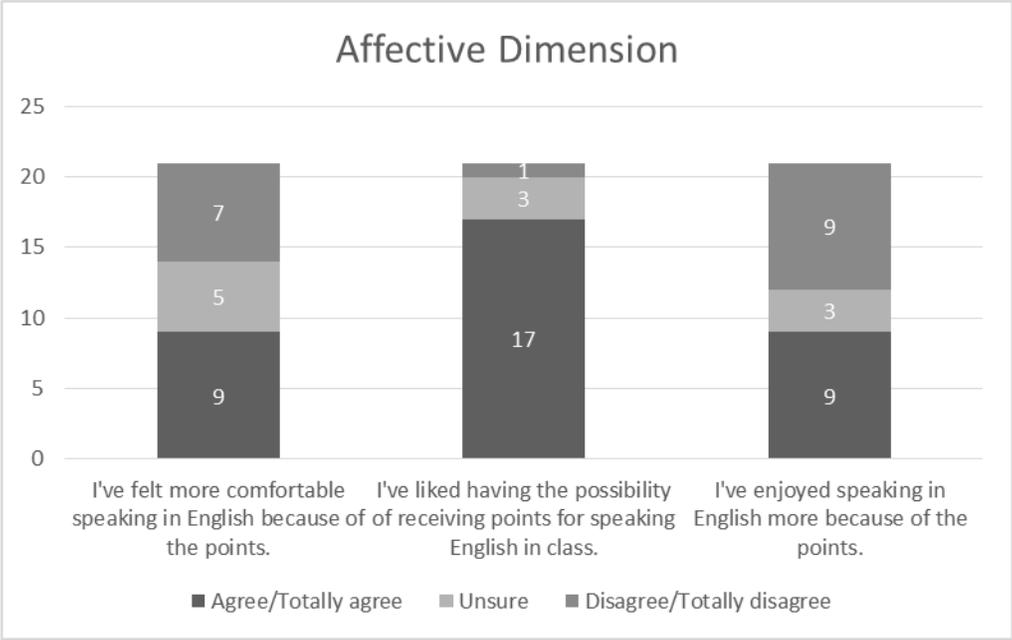
RESULTS

Quantitative results

Quantitative results will be examined in three dimensions: affective, behavioral, and cognitive, where affective looks to students' opinions about such factors as their enjoyment of the point system, behavioral to how they think the system effected their language learning behavior, and cognitive on their beliefs about the system and how it functioned in general.

In terms of affective results, students felt relatively comfortable using the system, where 42% marked this positively (Figure 1). They were much more positive on indicating that they liked the point system (*"I've liked having the possibility of receiving points for speaking in English"*), at 80%. In terms of enjoyment (*"I've enjoyed speaking in English more because of the points"*), there was a draw, where 42,8% marked this positively and the same percentage, 42,8% marked this as negative. These results are reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Affective dimension results: Students liked the system, felt comfortable and enjoyed speaking due to it



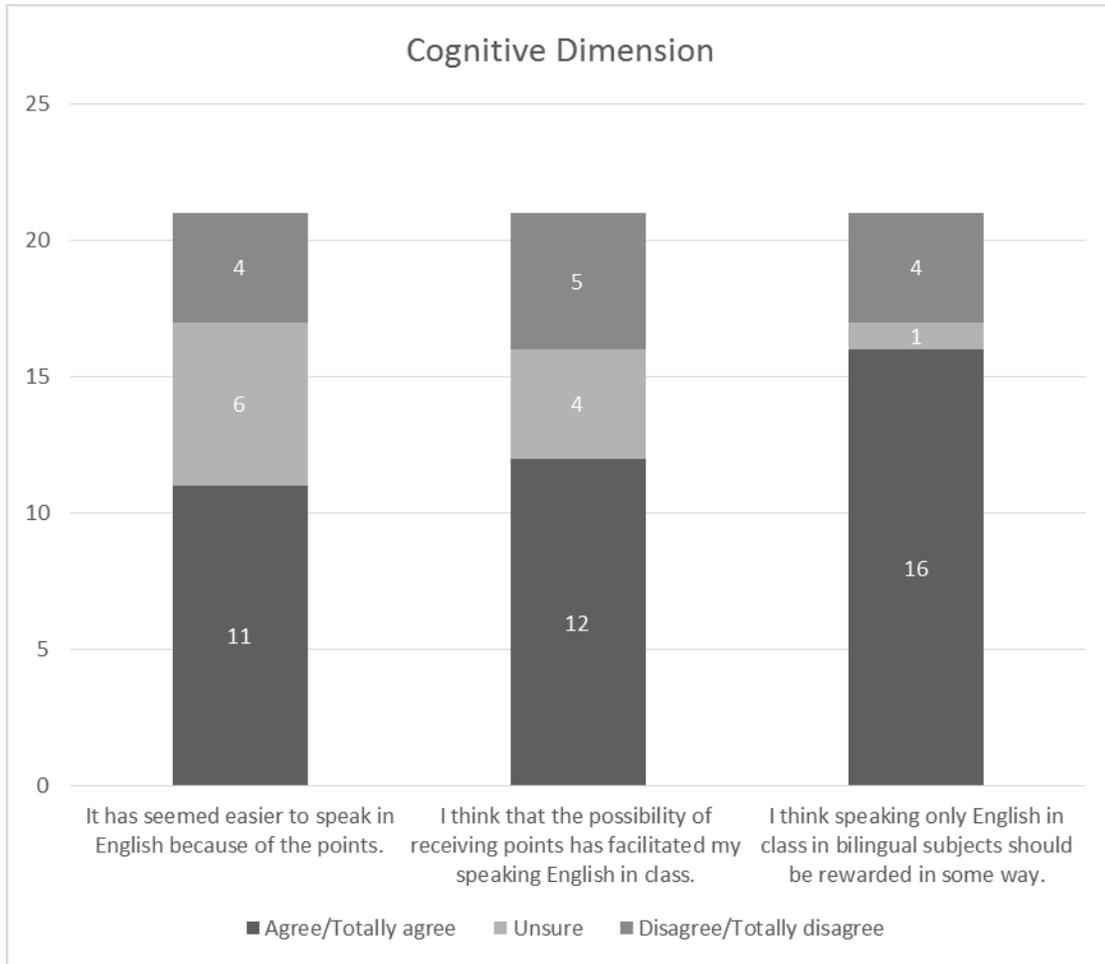
In terms of how the students saw the point system altering their language learning behavior, 61,9% agreed with the statement: *I think I've spoken more English in this class because of the possibility of receiving points*(19% disagreed), while 57,2% marked *If it wasn't for the points, I would have spoken more Spanish in this class* in agreement (33,3% disagreed). In terms of improving their English, 66,7% agreed with the item *I think I have improved my spoken English in class because of the points* (while 19% disagreed), Figure 2 Behavioral Dimension.

Figure 2. Behavioral Dimension: Students felt the system made them speak more English, less Spanish and improved their English overall



Finally, when examining students' beliefs, here called the cognitive dimension (Figure 3), about the point system, 52,3% noted that "It has seemed easier to speak in English because of the points" (28,6% were unsure here, and 19% disagreed). A similar percentage, 57,1%, agreed that "I think the possibility of receiving points has facilitated my speaking English in class" (23,8% disagreed). A larger majority, 76,1% agreed that "I think speaking only English in class in bilingual subjects should be rewarded in some way" (16% disagreed).

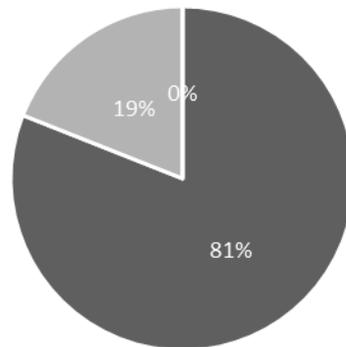
Figure 3. Cognitive dimension: Students felt the system facilitated speaking, and made it easier as well as agreed speaking English should be rewarded in general



When comparing this system to other possibilities, 81% would want to continue with a similar point-based system (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Future points system: Students agree that a similar points system should be used in the future

Cognitive Dimension: I think that to reward speaking English in class we should:



- Use a point system similar to ours
- Use a system, but a different one (see following question)
- I don't think it should be rewarded.

Qualitative results

In order to triangulate the data, we also gathered qualitative data on students' opinions. For the prompt "Tell me in your own words: Do students speak more English under a points reward system, or something similar? Why or why not?", some students responded negatively, although their responses were not so much to the system itself but rather toward the idea that a system was necessary:

Student 1:

-“It seems a bit absurd to me, since if you have chosen this bilingual degree program, it is because you are interested in learning to teach in English. If you don't want to speak English, why do this degree, if there is the option of studying in Spanish? The same for elementary school children: I do see it as viable, but at the University? It's like you're going to do a science degree and you don't want to learn the language of math, so why are you there if you don't want to study math?”

Student 2:

-“I believe that the use of English in the degree program should not be rewarded because each person should be responsible for their level of English in order to be a good teacher in the future. Much less should they be rewarded in the bilingual section because everyone, when signing up for the program, knows what they are getting into (50% of the credits in English).

Student 3:

-Yes, because it increases the motivation to be able to obtain something more than just a grade. However, I think we should speak English to learn and not just looking toward the grade”

In the last student's response we note a positive response to the system, but again a negative one to the need for such a system, echoing the other two students here.

As noted, the majority of students' written responses were positive, and we can classify these into two larger areas: general motivation and good discipline (fences, prods, whips and channels). In the first, general motivation, students' comments were positive for the points system because they associated it with good motivation overall, where some comments were:

-“It motivates us to improve ourselves by earning points and we also learn to speak fluently and enjoy English more”.

-“I think so because this way the students are more motivated and will participate more in class”.

-“Personally, I think it works both because the student is motivated and because being small groups there are more possibilities to speak”.

-“From my point of view, it is a way of motivating students. With rewards it is much more motivating for them to speak the language”.

-“I believe that students use English more if they receive points for it because they act as a stimulus and positive reinforcement that motivates students to use it”.

Other student comments that were positive on the points system seemed to go a step beyond it being just motivating. They indicated that it operated as a sort of fence, which kept students from using their Spanish too much:

-“I do think that they tend to speak more English, as it is a form of motivation to get a higher grade and at the same time it is a way of not falling into the temptation of speaking Spanish: otherwise you will lose points. Likewise, I have loved working in groups because it is easier to communicate in English with colleagues and gradually lose the fear of using English to express all our ideas”.

They also saw the system operating as a sort of whip that obligates students to use English more, some with more negative connotations (obligation, worry):

-“In my opinion, by having a points system in place speaking in English is more "an obligation than if it were not rewarded”.

-“By being more aware of the points or the reward that is received for speaking in the language, you worry more about speaking it to be able to be rewarded”.

Others noted a more positive framing:

-“Yes, because it increases the motivation to be able to obtain something more than just a grade. However, I think we should speak English to learn and not just looking toward a grade”.

Finally, other comments in this category looked to the point system as positive as a channel to get something beyond their normal attainment for an English class, sometimes with a positive trade-off, such as it requiring less effort than if they were trying to motivate themselves on their own:

-“Yes, because it is a way for them to motivate themselves so that they can acquire a higher level with little effort”.

-“I think yes, since those who may feel some fear or shyness when speaking in a language other than their mother tongue are rewarded, when receiving points, we are encouraged to speak in class”.

-“Yes, because on the contrary they would not bother or make an effort to speak in English and, therefore, an improvement in English would not be observed”.

-“I think so, since it helps to promote its use and helps us to get used to using it, in such a way that the English necessary for the learning standards in which we find ourselves in the bilingual program is spoken”.

DISCUSSION

Overall the point system, an instrumental tool for motivating students to practice spoken fluency in class, worked well for this group of students in a bilingual undergraduate degree program. It was rated favorably by students using it overall, where 81% said they liked the system, although comfort in using it and enjoyment were rated considerably lower at 42% and 42,8%, respectively. These were the lowest marked items for agreement in the overall questionnaire, so this may merit further questions. It may be that the system, which included being observed by the teacher who adjudicated the points, caused discomfort or lessened enjoyment. On the other hand, this difference may point to the fact that a more explicit push towards spoken language production may cause some tension, since using a foreign language in a spoken environment can cause higher levels of anxiety than other, less productive skills (Horwitz, 2010). Productive tasks have inherent social and personal risks such as embarrassment, and it may be that some level of discomfort is inevitable.

The system was also positively received in terms of its effectiveness for language skills, where 61% agreed that they spoke more English and 66,7% agreed that they improved their English. They also indicated that it was easier to speak English at 52% with this system and that it facilitated their speaking English at 57%, which seems to show that the system was simple to follow and aligned with the objective that students improve their speaking fluency. It should be noted again that fluency was the goal of this system, so that we are not rating the quality of students’ discourse, which might require a different system and which, if emphasized here, might cause more language learning anxiety. Students also pointed to the future in indicating that they feel speaking only English in class should be rewarded at 76%, though some negative comments clearly revealed disagreement with this idea in the qualitative data. They also would not change the system but follow a similar one in the future, which points to the fact that it is a system they would like to use again.

The detail in the written comments seems to point to why they believe it works: a point-based system, an instrumental motivation for using the language, obligates or prods students to use the language for an extrinsic reason, while acting at the same time as a fence to keep their L1 at bay. It can also be a conduit for better language learning habits, and result in better outcomes, helping students to overcome such personal traits as shyness, perhaps even with less effort, as indicated in the written comments.

CONCLUSION

Classroom factors are often mentioned as influencing students' WTC, where the classroom environment, teacher's role and their relationship with other students are important factors (House, 2004; Cao, 2009; Xie, 2011), but a gap exists in the research in terms of the classroom environment and evaluation. This paper asked if specifically more instrumental motivations, such as being able to earn points toward a final exam, would positively or negatively influence students' perceptions of their English use in class. Instrumental motivation over the years has fallen in disfavor, given the importance of integrative motivation in language learning and its predictive quality for future language success (Hernandez, 2008). Yet instrumental motivation seems omnipresent in most students' motivational orientations, and shouldn't be ignored. At least when teaching in an institutional, academic setting, it seems in fact impossible to avoid such extrinsic motivations: students are graded at the end of a course, and in Spain in particular; the grading system is still quite top-down, where one final exam can determine passing or failing the entire course. If students are going to have to act within such a system, offering the possibility of tying these instrumental constraints of weighty exams to a daily, more continuous system that explicitly rewards their efforts, is interesting. There is also a quality of gamification to such a system, where competition is introduced, though students are only competing against themselves and for themselves, since earning points will give them the ability to choose their final exam format. We should keep in consideration that such a system may not be ideal in terms of the possibility of causing some discomfort as an explicit push for students to produce language, and we should make sure students do not unduly experience anxiety in this process, keeping an eye out for individual differences which can affect language learners, such as shyness, etc.

Future queries would investigate how such a system might work within and with integrative factors, including classroom dynamics (small groups and project work) and cultural work. It would also be interesting to examine how they mitigate other extrinsic factors and possibly give students more control over other extrinsic factors.

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