# Apathy and procrastination: Negative attitudes that affect students' speaking skill improvement.

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"Language is the way in which people can transmit a message by using different ways such as words that could be spoken, written or through signs. Firstly there is speaking; through this way the voice, that has variable volume, pitch, rhythm, and speed" (Finegan, 2012. p.12). Learning a foreign language involves developing both: receptive and productive skills. About speaking, it is "a skill which deserves attention every bit as much as literary skills, in both first and second languages […]It is also a medium through which much language is learned, and which for many is particularly conducive to learning" (Bygate, 1993). For this reason, learners have to practice this ability in order to be more competent, especially if  they are trained  to become  English teachers. However, sometimes it does not happen since some students show negative attitudes towards the learning of this language despite the fact they need to show an excellent level of English it does not matter which school they teach in the future.


At the Faculty of Languages, there is the Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés where students are trained to be English teachers so it is supposed that they should be motivated to learn and practice the language as much as possible not only inside but also outside the classroom since practicing everywhere could help them to feel more self-confident to obtain the level B2 that  is required according to the  Faculty Plan de Estudios that says "El egresado será un docente versátil y flexible, interculturalmente competente y manejará la lengua Inglesa a un nivel B2 de acuerdo con lo planteado en el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas" (BUAP, 2009, pg. 30, 31). However, it does not always happen because it can be

seen students refusing to communicate in English in the classes and speaking in Spanish outside the classroom. This is contradictory since students know they have to use the foreign language but do not do it even they count with many tools in the school such as a library, internet, a laboratory with activities to practice each skill and subskill, tutorial programs, between others.

As it is seen many students do not show a positive attitude toward the foreign language but they continue in this career without worrying about their level in English. Trying to detect what provokes this problem, it was realized that negative attitude could be one of the reasons. Finding out about this kind of attitude towards the practice of the foreign language at the Faculty of Languages two types of negative attitudes were identified: procrastination and apathy.

In this article it is intended to try about the problem of procrastination and apathy and how these two type of negative attitudes affect LEI students learning and what strategies could be implemented to move this negative attitude to a positive one and students really obtain the level is required and can participate in an active way in their classes.

**The research questions in this investigation are the following:**

Why do LEI students have negative attitudes in studying?

How do LEI students manage their negative attitudes to learn and practice the language orally?

How can LEI students overcome from negative attitudes to improve the speaking skill?

What are the strategies teachers use to deal with these negative attitudes?

Taking into account that this research is based on students attitudes, the qualitative approach will be used because as Creswell (2009) says "qualitative research is a form to interpret inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand" (Creswell,

2009. p. 176). Besides "this involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation" (pg. 176) and allows researcher to "keep focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue" (p. 175). Consequently, students' negative attitudes through learning the language will be obtained with a survey   and a questionnaire.

Surveys are a very traditional way of conducting research. They are particularly useful for non-experimental descriptive designs that seek to describe reality. So, for instance, a survey approach may be used to establish the prevalence or incidence of a particular condition." (Mathers, N; Fox, N;  Hunn, A. 2017. p. 5) besides, "Surveys […] are a systematic way of asking people to volunteer information about their attitudes, behaviors, opinions and beliefs" (Ronald, J; Polland,R.J, 2005. p. 1) which allow us to describe and find out why LEI students have these negative attitudes and how they influence in the process of learning and developing the language orally. As it was mentioned before a questionnaire will apply to collect the data for this investigation.

**Literature review.**

**Attitude.**

Attitudes are a certain way of thinking or feeling of a person about an attitude object (a person, place, thing or event) which in turn influences the individual's thought and action. For Montano and Kasprzyk (2008 cited in Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari, 2012)

Attitude is determined by the individual´s beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing  the behavior (behavioral beliefs), weighted by evaluation of those outcomes or attributes. Thus, a person who holds strong beliefs that positively valued outcomes will result from performing the behavior will have a positive attitude toward the behavior. Conversely, a person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes will result from the behavior will have a negative attitude (p. 120)

Therefore According to Abidin, Ibrahim, Akiah (2011)

Attitudes play a major part in determining a person's personality. This is because attitudes affect the way people perceive and act towards people, objects or events that they encounter. Besides that, attitudes can also have an effect on one's social interactions." (p2)

Kara (2009) mentions that "attitudes towards learning besides opinions and beliefs have an obvious influence in students´ behaviors and consequently on their performance" (in Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari, 2012. p. 119). For this reason, if students show positive attitudes towards the learning of a foreign language, they will not face many problems to increase their competence in the FL they are learning.

**Classification of attitude.**

Wenden (1991 cited in Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari, 2012) classified attitude in three interrelated components: cognitive, affective and behavioral. The first one has to be with beliefs, thoughts, or viewpoints about the object of the attitude. The second concept refers to the individual´s feelings and emotions towards an object, whether this person likes or dislikes. The last component involves the tendency to adopt particular learning behaviors.

**How attitudes are formed.**

*Attitudes do not appear just one day in the existence of a man; they are a result of a long process and involves aspects such as socialization because,  as Amirah, Abidin, Ibrahim, Akiah (2011)*

"children acquire their parents' attitudes indirectly through the process of socialization. Besides parents, friends, teachers and acquaintances are also people who can shape our attitudes. Apart from the people come in contact with, the media also plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes of people. This is true as the media especially television has a great influence on people's attitude." (p.2)

Besides these can be formed from a person´s past and present and depending on the experience the person has with an attitude object, is the type of attitude the person will have in relation to that object, it is mean a positive or negative attitude. Therefore, if a person has  a

good experience with an attitude object, thus he/she will form positive attitude towards the object. However, he /she encounter bad experience with an attitude object, then he /she will probably have negative attitudes towards the object.

Amirah, Abidin, Ibrahim, Akiah (2011) declare that attitudes have a reason to exist since they have functions for people lives: a) the knowledge function, b) instrumentality function, c) ego defense function and d) value-expressiveness function. The first one has to be with the position of us with the relation of a new knowledge; the second one can help people adjust and adapt to the surroundings by going with the flow of the situation. The third one helps in protecting people form recognizing certain thoughts or feelings which may threaten the self-image or adjustment. Another one refers yo the value-expressiveness function. In this type  people derive satisfaction from expressing attitude appropriate to his personal values and his concept of themselves.

According to Pickens  (cited in Borkowki 2005)    "an attitude includes three components: an affect (a feeling), cognition (a thought or belief), and behavior (an action). Attitudes help us define how we see situations, as well as define how we behave toward the situation or object." (p.44)

**Importance of attitude when learning a FL.**

When learning a foreign language, students have to be ready to learn about many aspects related to that FL so their attitude towards it has to be as positive as possible to understand rules, structures, culture related to that language. Reid (2003 cited in Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari, 2012) states that "Attitudes are important to us because  they cannot be separately from study " (p. 121). So attitude becomes an essential factor that will influence the language performance. Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari, (2012) mention that attitude is so important because the achievement in the foreign language " relies not only on intellectual capacity, but also on the learners 'attitude towards language learning" where not only the academic phenomenon but the social and psychological ones have to be taken into consideration since depending on the learners´ motivation and attitude to learn the foreign language, the learner will succeed.   Students´ motivation and positive attitude plays an important role to facilitate the second or foreign language learning because the perception that students could have about it

will affect their attitude to it. Attitudes are evaluators of what is happening, which *"evoque like or dislike, agreement or disagreement, approval or disapproval"* (Wenden, 1991, p. 52) As attitudes decide if certain things are interesting or not, it can be said that there are negative and positive ones. In the positive attitudes, students will be able to have interest in what they are learning and have positive results while they practice and improve their second foreign language. In the negative attitudes, students will not be able to feel motivated and be capable to take risks while they face to new problems or situations in the second language learning process.

**The aspects that can influence attitudes can be:**

- Students' personality, because students are individuals with autonomous characteristics that could be similar to others, but not the same. Considering these characteristics, they can influence attitude by not giving the importance that the knowledge they are acquiring has.
- The environment of learning covers from the place in which it will be taught in school, classrooms, to the emotional environment such as voices, expectations, tempo, and humor. (Chastain, 1976, pp. 244,245) Its main impact is on the student's confidence in the place. If the student does not feel confident in the place he is learning and the elements that it has, his attitude will be negative.
- Learning goals. Each student when decides to learn a second language has a specific purpose; for working, to continuing studying, for traveling or other things; whatever the purpose can be, the goals are there to be achieved and if there are not in that way, the attitude will be negative.

All these aspects could make think that attitudes cannot be changed, but they can. As Borkowski (2005) says "To change a person's attitude you need to address the cognitive and emotional components" (Borkowski, 2005, p. 50), however, it takes effort, time and patience.

**Negative attitude.**

Talking about negative attitudes, it was found that apathy and procrastination are two types of attitudes.

**Apathy**

Apathy is a negative attitude which affects human performance during certain activity or situation. This term describes a lack of interest and emotion to something that is faced. According to Stanton *"apathy means lack of interest, enthusiasm, concern or emotion and can refer to an aspect of normal experience."* (Stanton, 2016, p. 1) Its main common characteristics are:

> Reduced initiative (lack of effort, dependency on others to structure activity); reduced interest (lack of interest in learning new things or in new experiences, lack of concern about one's personal problems); reduced emotional responsiveness (unchanging affect, lack of emotional responsivity to positive or negative events). (p.2*)*

The main impact that this negative attitude has on students is that it affects their process of learning the foreign language. It makes students have less interest in the way in how they can improve and how they get better in it, less interest in new knowledge they can acquire and do not feel motivated to continue with the learning. With this attitude, student does not feel motivated to get better in the language. While students suffer from apathy their level of learning is lower than in other cases in which they feel motivated to try new things or get better by practising or getting involved in the language.

**2.12 Procrastination**

Procrastination refers to the performance of activities at last moment. During procrastination, students are affected because they do not practice at the time they are required. As a negative attitude, people who procrastinate, according to the Academic Skills Center (nd) are: 1) they are often remarkably optimistic about his ability to complete a task on a tight deadline; 2) low self-confidence and low self-esteem; 3) stubbornness, procrastination may be used as an expression of stubbornness or pride. 4) manipulation, procrastination may be used to control or manipulate the behavior of others." and frustration, "the procrastinator often feels like a victim: he cannot understand his behavior or why he cannot get work done like others. The whole thing is a

frustrating mystery. The reasons for his behavior are hidden from him." (Academic Skills Center, p.2).

While procrastination is having a negative impact in students, the time in which the activities must be performed is getting over and students start to feel stressed to get the "final work" done, and do not allow them to make the performance of the "work" in an acceptable way in which their previous knowledge can be reinforced.

**Methodology.**

As it was mentioned above, the type of investigation will be qualitative and the method used is a survey research sinc they are particularly useful for non-experimental descriptive designs that seek to describe reality.

The subjetcs that will take part in this research are students from two sections from the Faculty of Languages – BUAP who will take English Target Language 2 and English  teachers teaching in those sections on Autumn 2018.

The instruments to obtain the data are two questionnaires, one for the students and one for the teachers. In the teachers' questionnaires the main aspects are students' attitudes to the study, their participation in class, the skill that they develop better and their possible solutions to deal against negative attitudes from students. In the students' questionnaires the questions are about the skill that are difficult for them to develop, the aspects that interfere in developing those skills, their performance in classes and their perception of the teacher performance in the class.

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