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## Developing Motivation through an ICT Cooperation Project Plan in English between Spanish and German Students

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### Abstract

*This case study aims to research the connection between motivation and real-life experiences in the use of the English language through an ICT cooperation project plan between two centres. Introducing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by means of videoconferences and the Edmodo network, we connect teenagers from different countries who share hobbies and interests. The goal is that students from Spanish 3rd-grade compulsory secondary education or their equivalent 9th-grade German peers use English as a lingua franca to achieve their objectives. This also helps students to acquire a foreign language (English) in a motivating and communicative environment and to develop competencies that are usually relegated to the background in standard English classes. In total, 104 teenagers participated in this study, in which they had to write letters, record a video, and participate in three videoconferences. The research started with an online meeting between the two teams of teachers from both centres in which the general guidelines were set up. The research instruments that the students had to carry out during the project were pictures and letters, videoconferences, and finally a profile on an educational social network. The results show how this cooperation project motivated them to the point that they could end their school year with a better grade than they had before starting the project as they shared interests in the use of English to maintain cooperation with their peers.*

**Keywords:** cooperation, English learning, exchange, lingua franca, motivation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English might be boring for some Spanish students since they do not seem to see long-term use for the language. Although teachers keep on telling them how important it is to learn a second language for their professional lives, they do not usually think about their future since they are generally focused on themselves and their current problems. This is quite the opposite of their German counterparts as they reckon that learning a foreign language opens them to new and unknown pathways. [Piaget \(1995\)](#) described teenage egocentrism as being based on confusion or lack of differentiation between thinking internal aspects and reality external aspects that surround them. For this reason, realizing that the English language works as a *lingua franca* between non-native speakers might be a great motivation for them.

[Marlina and Xu \(2019\)](#) recognised the predominant use of English in diverse international economic and cultural arenas. However, they failed to recognise its role as a motivating factor among students of different countries to improve their proficiency in English. They focused on the role of English nowadays and the importance of learning it for communication purposes. Therefore, the research statement we hereby propose is to show how students can improve their English level by participating in an ICT cooperation project plan.

Living in a globalized world has led English to be the *lingua franca* spoken by everyone who wants to communicate everywhere. Therefore, connecting students of the same age, hobbies, and interests but with different native languages is a way of using English as a *lingua franca* in a situation outside of the standard lesson planning. This research created an ICT cooperation project between two European high schools that might develop later into an eTwinning or Erasmus+ project financed by the European Union in the future. With these programs, the teachers can organise and run both on-site and online activities with their corresponding students along with colleagues from the participating countries (Spain and Germany).

For this reason, having students who can only communicate in English and creating a digital connection between them might prevent communication problems, since they already know each other at a certain level after they have written or digitally talked. According to [Ceylan \(2021\)](#), using English as a *lingua franca* among teenagers who do not share the same mother tongue but share hobbies, thoughts, or perspectives might work as a motivational factor for them to realise that English is much more than grammar or vocabulary learnt in class.

Consequently, teachers who introduce ICTs have a better chance to increase their students' motivation as the learning process concentrates on the students rather than on the teacher ([Paudel, 2020](#)). However, it is still true that using ICT increases students' curiosity and improves their critical thinking skills. According to [Haleem et al. \(2022\)](#), the development of technologies facilitates this kind of project and teachers must be able to use this opportunity to their advantage. If teenagers are keen on technologies, introducing them will increase their motivation among them.

Therefore, all these benefits set the goal of using this exceptional opportunity to develop an ICT cooperation plan among non-native English students. The research statement proposed is to investigate whether using the language in informal contexts where students participate for the sake of communication helps them increase their motivation levels, together with their school grades, and their perception of the English language. It will be interesting for students to interact through correspondence,

videoconferences, and an online social network with peers from another country since previous studies did not focus on such a type of research. In the end, what we shall foresee is that the students' grades will improve after the cooperation project.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before starting with the project, it is necessary to understand some key concepts that will be directly and indirectly worked on during the project development, such as the concept of second language acquisition, the definition of motivation, the explanation of what a language exchange is and a description of both the Erasmus+ and eTwinning projects created by the European Union.

Besides, although a lot of research has previously been published on second language acquisition, motivation, and European language programs, none has specifically focused on the benefits of such an ICT cooperation project for the improvement of the pupils' English level. Having students motivated to use English to communicate with their peers is a topic that has not been researched in depth yet. This is precisely where the originality and novelty of this study lie.

### 2.1 Second Language Acquisition

According to [Kanwai et al. \(2022\)](#), second language acquisition (SLA) is the acquisition of another language after the mother tongue's knowledge is completed. SLA is a complicated and systematic process which is influenced by many factors that interact with each other such as age, personal experience, native language, or motivation ([Sun, 2019](#)). Moreover, the students' culture and social and economic background are also relevant external factors.

#### 2.1.1 Factors influencing SLA

Many linguists believe that age is an essential factor in language learning. In their study, [Ozfdian and Burlbaw \(2019\)](#) mentioned that acquiring a second language after the age of five might have physical advantages related to phonetic control of the second language, contrary to adults who cannot develop this plasticity as easily as children normally do. However, the result of this study also conveyed that age was not always the most dominant factor in successfully achieving language attainment in instructed language.

According to [Herschensohn and Young-Scholten \(2018\)](#), childhood is the best moment to acquire a second language. However, this is not only physical, since the older a person is, the more difficult it becomes to master the language as the situations that adults face are more complex. Therefore, the language needed to express the idea is also more complicated.

Another relevant and individual difference to take into consideration is the native language spoken by the learners. As the students' native languages are Spanish and German, some transfer into the second language (L2) will occur. Regarding error-making when learning a foreign language, linguists claim that the interference between the mother tongue and the newly learnt language is an important source for making errors ([Válcea, 2020](#)).

However, this transfer does not always have to be negative. According to [Zhang et al. \(2022\)](#), negative transfer reduces the learning performance in the target language and has been a long-standing and challenging problem. Various approaches have been proposed in the literature to handle it. German native speakers can correctly distinguish vowel length on the contrary to Spanish students, for whom there is no distinction between long and short vowels.

Moreover, word order plays an important role in English and German since it is more flexible in Spanish. Then, when building sentences, the structure followed by the German speakers is usually closer to the English language than the Spanish ones. However, for Spanish students, grammar is easier as the tenses are similarly used, for instance, the progressive tenses, which do not exist in German.

The teenage period is also well-known for the identity crisis suffered when teenagers are in search of their identity and role in society. Among adolescents, identity is of great importance because it is the first time when physical development, cognitive skills, and social expectations coincide, which enables adolescents to understand childhood identifications to construct a viable pathway toward adulthood ([Upreti, 2017](#)). Consequently, many will struggle to balance all the input received by society ([Elsayed, 2021](#)). In Spain, for instance, people speaking English without a Spanish accent are perceived by others as considering themselves superior. Social dynamics are influential for teenagers, and they might speak English with a strong Spanish accent on purpose, so they are accepted by their peers.

One of the first theories about SLA was the behaviourist theory which was based on [Pavlov's \(1927\)](#) work founded on repetition, practice, and reinforcement. This habit formation is what enhances language learning. The grammar-translation method is based on sentence repetition until they are learned by heart ([Thornbury, 2017](#)). However, this memorizing process was not effective since there were no natural dialogues or free production.

The innatist perspective was developed by [Chomsky \(2002\)](#) as a criticism of behaviourist theories and developed the concept of Universal Grammar, a knowledge that every child has that allows them to acquire a second language. This perspective lets the child discover by himself how to use the language, but it is necessary for them to be exposed to the language first. Therefore, communication provides an identity that shapes them in different settings ([Mulyani, 2019](#)).

Krashen's monitor model (1981, in [Hunkler, 2017](#)) is one of the most representative of this theory and englobes five hypotheses that focus on learning a language with meaning and without being based on repetition. One of the most relevant hypotheses is the comprehensible input hypothesis which states that acquisition occurs when the learner is exposed to a comprehensive input + 1, which means grammar or vocabulary beyond their knowledge ([Hunkler, 2017](#)).

The cognitive perspective theories use the metaphor of the human mind as compared to a computer that can store and search for data. These theories distinguish between learning and acquiring a language as there is a process that the learners must follow to acquire the language ([Dorsch, 2021](#)).

Other linguists such as [Lightbown and Spada \(2013\)](#) have defined SLA as skill learning, which means that every person starts with declarative knowledge defined as the knowledge they are aware of having. This knowledge might become procedural, which implies being able to use it through practice and finally automatizing it. This

theory explains why native speakers may not remember the grammar rules of their languages since they have forgotten this declarative knowledge.

### *2.1.2 Teaching approach to facilitate SLA*

Learning a second language in the classroom is different from learning it in non-educative contexts such as many immigrants learning by talking to people. This environment is thought to be more successful for language learning as it is considered natural learning. Natural acquisition settings are those where the learner is directly exposed to the foreign language and in this environment, the learning process develops by interacting with others in many situations. In addition, learners often interact with proficient speakers of the language, which means that delivering the message is more relevant than correctness.

Institutional settings present some structures that the natural setting cannot offer, such as guided learning, meaning that grammar and vocabulary are presented step by step. This enables language to be the focus rather than the message. However, to develop a good command of the foreign language, these classes should not be the only contact or interaction opportunity as they only face the language for a few hours a week. This situation does not happen in real-life contexts, which may lead to the learners' fear of speaking since they are often corrected by the teacher, and this might undermine their confidence.

However, none of these two methods by themselves is completely effective since learners need some guidance and feedback for correcting errors that only language learning institutions can give. Therefore, a communicative instructional setting is a combination of natural and institutional settings. According to [Azimova \(2019\)](#), the implementation of communicative activities in EFL/ESL classrooms prepares learners to use English beyond their own needs, interests, and opportunities fostering group and pair work.

This focus on meaning implies that students interact with each other, and they might produce and receive incorrect input and output, which the teacher or other students can correct if it is an error made repeatedly or interferes with the understanding of the message. This environment also allows learners to participate and produce more in class opposite to teacher frontal classes, where the teacher is the one producing the language and the learners are passive participants.

## **2.2 Motivation**

As defined by [Ushiada \(2020\)](#), motivation in second language learning is the attempt and desire to learn, as well as having positive attitudes toward learning. Studies in motivation psychology show that there are two types of motivation: instrumental motivation (extrinsic), which is the motivation for learning the language to reach practical objectives, and integrative motivation (or intrinsic), which means learning the language for personal development and cultural enrichment. The most common type of motivation in schools is usually extrinsic motivation since students work and learn to receive external rewards such as good grades. This motivation also looks for external validation usually coming from the teacher. This motivation is not permanent considering the variability of external factors.

However, many researchers and psychologists, such as [Delaney and Royal \(2017\)](#), believe that the real motivation is intrinsic because it is a crucial mechanism for open-ended cognitive development since it is the driver of spontaneous exploration and curiosity. Therefore, once students develop this motivation, the results and engagement will improve as learning has become a personal reward.

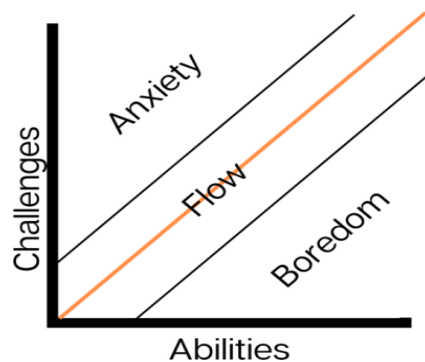
The self-efficacy theory explains how self-efficacy develops and is altered, as well as how self-efficacy impacts on behavioural change, performance accomplishments, and personal well-being ([Lippke, 2020](#)). This concept is responsible for their learning success, as the learners convince themselves that they can reach their goals. However, this theory has been criticised as it might develop frustration if the objectives cannot be achieved.

According to [Skinner et al. \(2022\)](#), learning rarely occurs without significant practice and guidance regardless of the context in which it takes place. This guidance is often referred to as feedback and it is used by learners to make changes to improve their performance. Under learning orientation, the aim is to increase competence by learning or mastering a new task.

The attribution theory developed by [Weiner \(2010\)](#) completes the previous theories and focuses on the learners' self-esteem to measure the resulting performance. If this performance is positive, the self-concept improves, whereas it will decrease if the results are negative. According to [Shaver \(2018\)](#), this motivation is intrinsic, as the results depend on internal attributions that will affect future expectations.

The self-determination theory is an approach that unites human motivation and personality using traditional empirical methods and metatheory for personality development and self-regulation of behaviour ([Ryan & Deci, 2018](#)). This approach states that the learners' innate tendencies foster the positive process of learning, integration, and social development.

[Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi \(2019\)](#) define flow as 'to have a smooth continuity'. This continuity is what the flow theory emphasizes since it states that the learners reach their highest motivation when they are absorbed by doing one task).



**Figure 1.** Flow theory ([Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2019](#)).

To enhance motivation, it is relevant to emphasize that learning a foreign language focuses not only on grammar but also on communicating with people from other countries. According to [Larrea Espinara and Raigón Rodríguez \(2019\)](#), it is a generally accepted fact that teaching culture of a foreign country should be an integral part of the foreign language classroom. Language cannot exist without culture,

otherwise teaching a language would be just a set of symbols which could be used with a wrong meaning. This orientation depicts the real communicative situations that the learner might face when putting their knowledge into practice.

Thus, based on motivation theories and how they are integrated into foreign language teaching, it is possible to state that learning autonomy is related to the level of motivation of the students as they are responsible and in control of their learning process. Ceylan (2021) defines the learner's autonomy as "to have, and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning the objectives, contents and progressions, methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and its evaluation" (p. 152).

Motivated students also show high aspirations; they are ambitious and are willing to challenge themselves and live new experiences. Motivation also enhances their perseverance since these students invest time and effort in their learning process and are not easily frustrated or discouraged as they know they will positively progress. All these characteristics lead to good language learners being motivated to acquire a foreign language successfully. Although the characteristics of a good language learner need to be known, they generally have contact with native speakers, listen to the radio or TV, read as much as they can, or learn grammar in class or at home (Fitria, 2022). These learners have a high tolerance for ambiguity, are patient with themselves, aware of their own learning styles, and not afraid to ask questions or make mistakes.

### **2.3 Language Exchange Programmes: eTwinning, Erasmus +, CEFR**

Since learning English in school is usually an artificial process, a language exchange means engagement in authentic communication. Students do not have many opportunities to use the language in real communicative situations. Therefore, these exchange programmes improve their language production, which is not as developed as language reception. Also, introducing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in this exchange and cooperation programme brings new opportunities to the students to responsibly use the Internet as a language learning instrument since ICTs benefit and stimulate the learning process as they provide authenticity and modernity in the English foreign language classroom.

#### *2.3.1 eTwinning*

The European Union has developed two main projects to promote cooperation between countries. The first project is called "eTwinning" and connects different schools in Europe, encouraging the use of ICTs and cultural exchange between students from different nationalities. The second project, whose name is "Erasmus+", is a project designed to support youth education and sport. The eTwinning programme facilitates finding a partner to develop an online project as more than 300,000 teachers and 140,000 educational centres cooperate in the project. The main objective of eTwinning is that students from different countries work together to develop the project and present a common result. Since the project materialises online, ICT usage is key to implement and produce the project (European Commission, 2018).

### 2.3.2 Erasmus +

To encourage language learning, the Erasmus+ programme offers language learning opportunities through mobility exchanges or through virtual student exchanges that foster intercultural dialogue and tolerance. The Erasmus+ project is not only dedicated to students, but teachers can also benefit from this. There are many opportunities for further education programmes such as job shadowing, where teachers are allowed to visit other educational centres across Europe and observe the methodology used (European Commission, 2020). There are also programmes where teachers can briefly work in a school from a country that participates in this programme so they can broaden their experience and knowledge.

### 2.3.3 The Common European Framework of Reference

This ICT cooperation project needs to be contextualised since the legal framework, the educational centres, and the groups of students differ from Spain to Germany. Nowadays, foreign languages are regulated by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) which states the differentiation and learning levels of the languages (Council of Europe, 2022). Since both centres are in Europe, it is important to mention the CEFR created by the European Union that joins the competencies that learners must acquire from A1 to C2.

The CEFR influences the Spanish law since the key competencies and learning standards are based on it. The current educational law in Spain is the Organic Law 3/2020 of December 29, 2020 (LOMLOE), which modifies the Spanish Organic Law LOMCE from 2013, and it states that the English language must be taught following basic and specific competencies, contents, evaluation criteria, and learning standards. The basic law of the Federal Republic of Germany from September 2020 is a modification from the version of May 1949 which establishes that education must be free and compulsory for every child living in the country. In Germany, each land oversees the education politics; therefore, in Lower Saxony, the educational laws for the *Realschule* level are found in the *Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium*. The *Kerncurriculum mit pandemiebedingten Hinweisen und Priorisierungen Englisch* was published in 2021 and modified the previous one from 2019.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Research Design

The research design was conducted in five different stages during the second half of the academic year with different instruments being used in each case. In the first place, students had to complete a motivation questionnaire in class about their interests and expectations. In the second place, the teachers involved analysed the students' grades resulting from a standard written test carried out in class, which measured their listening, writing, and reading skills, as well as an oral interview. In the third place, in class students had to write a presentation letter in English to introduce themselves to their counterparts. In the fourth place, students developed three videoconferences where they could exchange information and share likes and interests.



Finally, in the fifth stage, students had to update their blog entries in the Edmodo network to follow up on the exchange program. The goal was to establish links between students from both centres to foster cooperation for future years.

But before the ICT cooperation project started, teachers from both centres had an online meeting that took place on February 28, 2023. During this meeting, the objectives were discussed, and every teacher agreed that developing oral and written competencies was as important as developing emotional intelligence and intercultural one to foster cooperation and collaboration. Motivating the students was a milestone should we aim to improve their English level. After having discussed the rules and objectives of the project, an official document was presented to assure transparency. Once this document was approved by both departments, school boards, and families, the project could officially start.

The work with special needs students was taken into consideration since there were two cases in the Spanish group and seven in the German one. These students could use ICTs to work better, and another evaluation system was carried out that the special needs teacher had designed for them. These students had partners based on their performance, for example, the grades of the student with autism were average. In this case, what was more important was to pair him with someone with high emotional intelligence, so the interaction could take place.

### **3.2 Participants in the Study**

The participants involved in this project correspond to students doing 3rd year of Compulsory Secondary Education in a centre in the city of Granada (Spain), and ninth grade in a village called Dörverden (Germany). On the Spanish part, there were 48 students involved, while on the German one, there were 56 students participating. In the following sections, we will offer a detailed analysis of each centre.

#### *3.2.1 The Spanish Centre*

The Spanish centre is a private subsidised centre which is in the city of Granada. This centre has a long tradition in the city since it is located close to two traditional worker neighbourhoods with a medium-low family income and low cultural access or level. These families do not normally participate in the parents' organisation of the centre (AMPA) and have almost no connection with the school. This neighbourhood is known for being one of the most impoverished ones, where many police raids have taken place to fight against drugs and criminality. For this reason, many students have some discipline problems since they grew up surrounded by people who did not respect the authority power of the police.

This centre has a bilingual certification, which means that some subjects are taught in English following the CLIL methodology. For this reason, the cooperation project with another European country is for them an opportunity to later take part in the eTwinning project financed by the European Union since many teachers have already taken part in the Erasmus+ internship.

The Spanish group is formed of 48 students with different levels and abilities in the same class. The difference between female and male students is remarkable; most of the girls have a higher level as their families also have a higher income. On the contrary, few boys can afford private English classes resulting in a lower level in class.

There is one student with visual difficulties who works with her laptop and electronic books, so she can zoom in and read the texts and exercises. Moreover, there is one student with autism syndrome, and he needs the worksheets printed in A3 format because it helps him focus on the paper and easily read and write since he has more space between letters and lines.

### 3.2.2 *The German Centre*

On the other side, there is the German centre located in a small village called Dörverden in Lower Saxony, a region in the north of Germany. The main job sector in the village is related to farming and construction. Although the cultural offer is relatively low, there are two big cities not far away with a bigger offer in different cultural fields.

The school system in Germany is divided into different types of schools, and this one is called *Realschule*. In this kind of centre, the final title that the students receive allows them to continue studying for Baccalaureate if they complete three courses at the highest level of performance. Obtaining a basic *Realschule* title means that they stay until the 10th grade, and after that, they can join a vocational training school, but they cannot study at university.

The German group is divided by level into four different classes. There are 56 students in total, divided into groups of seven to 18 students. These groups are differentiated by level, resulting in two advanced courses, where students must have higher performance, one basic course, which focuses on developing a basic oral competence, and one course for students with special learning needs where a special needs teacher helps the English teacher.

Most of the German students are bilingual since their families come from countries different from Germany, resulting in most of them speaking Croatian, Arabic, or Turkish as well as German. Moreover, there are three students with special social needs and four who need assistance as they have learning disabilities, or they still do not command the German language. These seven students are in a separate class where the English teacher works together with a special needs teacher.

## 3.3 **Research Instruments**

The instruments used in the project included a motivation questionnaire to know about their interests; a standard written test to grade their listening, writing, and reading skills; a presentation letter in which they had to introduce themselves; three videoconferences to get to know each other; and blog entries in the Edmodo network to keep in contact. In the following lines, we will offer a detailed analysis of each instrument. But before starting, parents had to sign their consent that their children were doing this exchange with students from another country, and their permission was asked for the teenagers to send pictures and letters, do videoconferences, and finally create a profile on an educational social network.

In the first place, to know the students' beliefs before starting the project, they had to fill out one motivation questionnaire with 10 questions where they had to reflect on the importance of English as a lingua franca and their performance during the project. Moreover, this questionnaire was also helpful in comprehending their opinion

about the project. The same questionnaire was handed out at the end of the project to check if their level of motivation had increased as we will reflect in the results section. In the second place, the students' grades were analysed in both centres through a standard written test to measure their level of skills (listening, writing, and reading), and a 5-minute personal interview to check their speaking skills. The students with difficulties were allowed to carry out the interview in pairs.

The third instrument used was a presentation letter in which the German students had to introduce themselves to their Spanish counterparts. These letters had to follow the structure conveyed by the teachers of both centres: description, hobbies, family, and cultural features and presentation of their city. Once every student had written their letter, the teachers differentiated them using four colours: pink (extreme basic level), blue (basic level), green (low advanced and good basic level), and yellow (very advanced level). Based on this differentiation, it was easier to create partners. Having read the letters of those students with lower grades and motivation levels, it was more effortless to partner them with students who had similar interests or hobbies.

Then each colour group had to create a short presentation video about their city or town, centre, hobbies, etc., which was the fourth instrument used. This video helped them overcome shyness and the fear of speaking in English. The first videoconference took place after each student had written three letters. Each differentiated group had a 25-minute videoconference with the other group under the teachers' supervision. Previously they had prepared some questions for the other group and the teachers had sent them to the other centre, so they could prepare the answers. This method mostly helped students in the pink and blue groups as they were able to understand and answer the questions. After this first oral contact, it was remarkable that students in both centres spent the rest of their days talking about the meeting and discussing other questions that they wanted to ask, what they understood, and other topics related to the videoconference.

Finally, after the videoconferences took place, students had to log into the social network Edmodo, which was the last instrument we used, where they could join their corresponding exchange group. This platform enables the students to share blog entries where they can update their daily routines, personal experiences, or anecdotes they want to exchange with other students from the same group. The students with special needs were allowed to use their iPads or laptops during the project, so they sent their digital letter via email to the teacher and then received a scanned copy of the letter the partner sent.

Once this first contact had been established and to continue with the interactions in class, the students had to create a profile on the educational social network Edmodo, join the exchange group created by one of the teachers and regularly post and comment on their peers' profiles. The main rule was that they had to write in English and the post had to be suitable for an educational environment. To conclude, the following step would be a real exchange funded by the Erasmus+ programme where students would be able to visit each other's countries and centres.

#### **4. RESULTS**

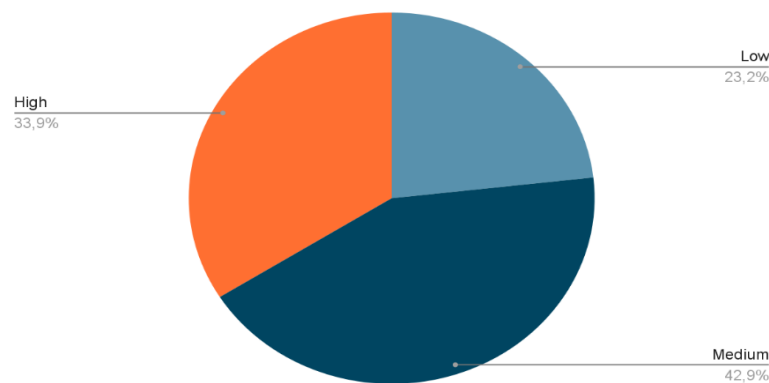
In this section we analyse the results obtained before and after the project took place in terms of increasing the level of motivation of the students and their level of

English using the different instruments that we analysed in the previous section. After carrying out this ICT cooperative project, the students were not only much more motivated to use English to communicate, but at the end of the academic course their performance and their grades in English improved.

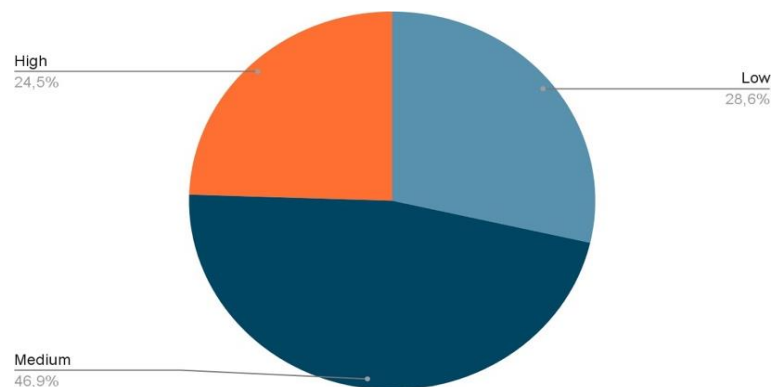
#### 4.1 Motivation Results

This cooperation project is aimed at increasing the students' level of motivation. Motivation was developed by receiving letters and pictures from other teenagers and realising that they can understand and be understood by students from other countries. Something relevant about the motivation level at the beginning of the project was the similarity of low results between both centres.

The results obtained from the questionnaire at the beginning of the project can be seen in the next figures. The motivation level was low in both centres and several students had the feeling that they would never get a good grade, even if they studied. In addition, some students from Germany answered that they would never need English to communicate since they would never leave Dörverden.

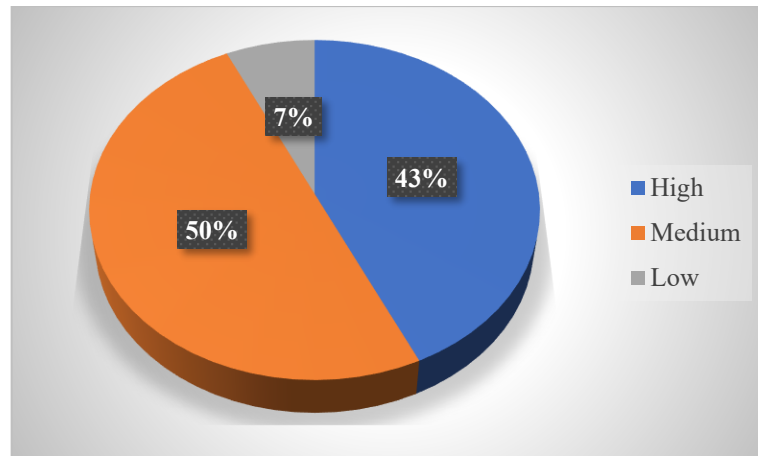


**Figure 2.** Motivation level – German students.

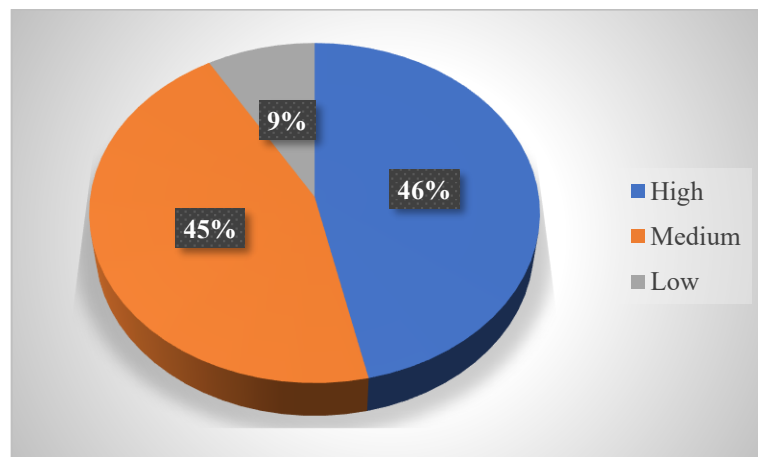


**Figure 3.** Motivation level – Spanish students.

The results obtained after the implementation of the cooperation plan between the centres clearly show that the level of motivation of the pupils increased significantly in both cases, almost doubling the percentage in the case of the Spanish pupils. In the case of the German students, a high degree of motivation increased by 9.1%, and a medium level by 7.1% while a low level of motivation decreased by 16.2%. As for the Spanish students, the number of students with a high level of motivation increased a 21.4%, while a medium level scarcely decreased a 2%, and a low level significantly decreased a 19.6%.

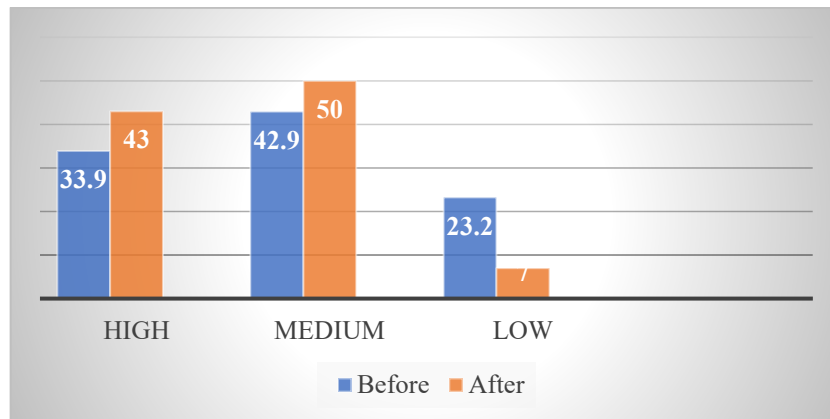


**Figure 4.** Motivation level – German students.

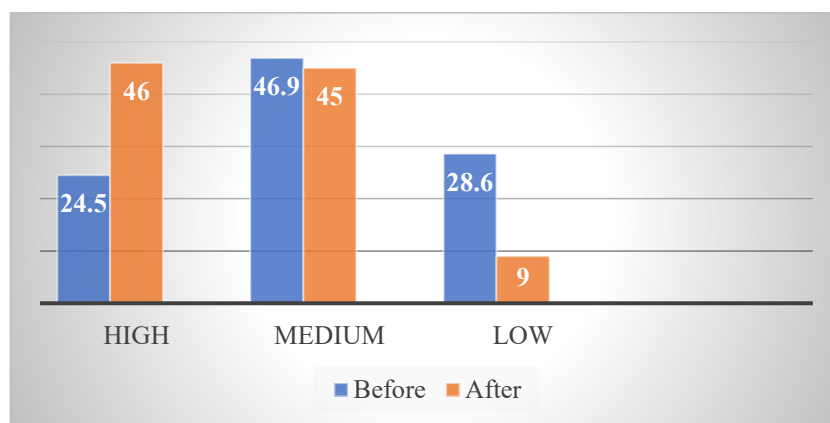


**Figure 5.** Motivation level – Spanish students.

The comparative results in both centres before and after developing the project can be seen in the next figures.



**Figure 6.** Differences in motivation level – German students.

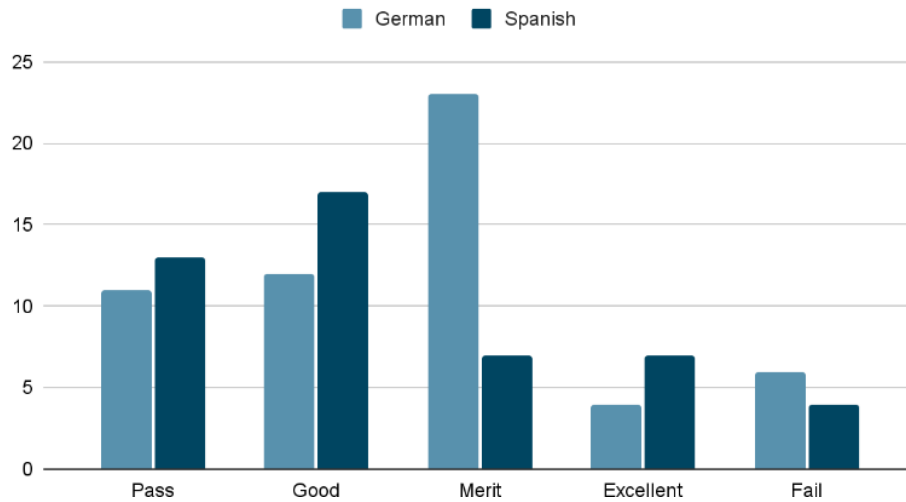


**Figure 7.** Differences in motivation level – Spanish students.

Self-efficacy was enhanced since students were aware of their language level and knew they could communicate in English with the other group. This efficiency was higher when students were writing their letters than when they had to speak during the videoconference. However, the performance was related to the student's level of English and expectations, meaning that they felt more confident while writing than while speaking. Moreover, students' willingness to communicate rose the moment they received letters with photographs from the students at the other school centre.

#### 4.2 Grade Results

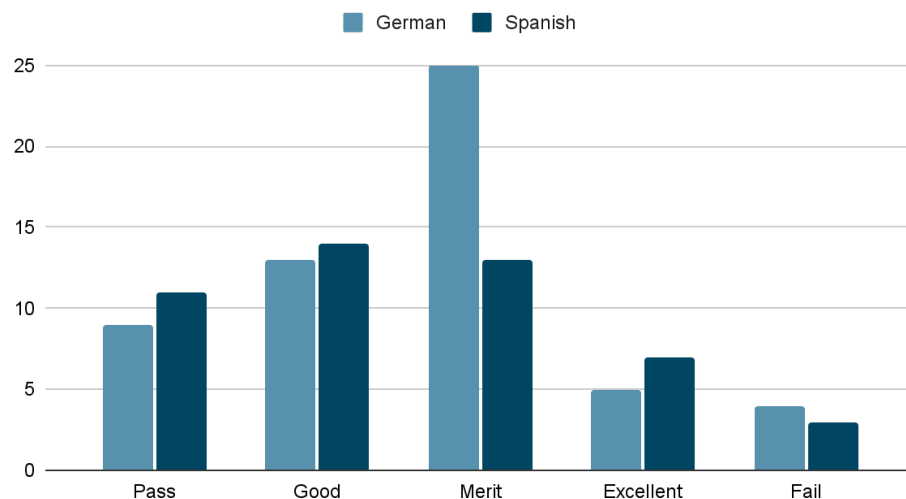
The results obtained from the written test carried out before the project can be seen in the next figure. On the one hand, there were 11 students who failed the subject due to behavioural reasons since they did not pay any attention in class, do their homework, or study for the exams. However, after having some conversations with the English teacher and the tutor, it was clear that these students had much potential. On the other side, 23 students excelled in the subject as their families were able to pay for extracurricular private classes. However, this group was not motivated enough as they were convinced that they had a higher level and used to find lessons boring.



**Figure 8.** Students' grades before the project.

In the average group, 28 students worked hard and wanted to improve their skills; they paid attention and worked correctly. On the contrary, there was another group who could quickly improve their grades only by paying attention in class. In this group, there were three German students and four Spanish ones.

Grades at the end of the 3rd year of Compulsory Secondary Education improved for some students. It is interesting to remark that a large number of them had problems with the writing part of the exams, and in their final exam, their performance improved significantly as they could reproduce the grammar rules better than before. At the end of the project, students in both centres had to undertake a written exam to measure their improvement, whose results are shown in the next figure.



**Figure 9.** Students' grades at the end of 3rd CSE.

One of the main differences can be observed in the Spanish group, where 11 students improved their final grade; the majority of them were from good to merit, and one of them could pass the subject at the end of the year. This case was one of the students who, in the first questionnaire, answered that he would never get a good

grade even if he studied. Having this result was a great motivator for him since he asked if the project would continue the following academic year.

The German group also improved, although not as significantly as the Spanish group. The main observation in this group was when they wrote the final exams that took place in the ninth and 10th grades. Their writing skills improved greatly in comparison with their first performances. Two students were able to pass the subject and it helped them not to repeat the ninth grade. This was a motivation factor, as one of them had previously repeated the seventh grade and she was feeling frustrated.

### **4.3 Results on the Presentation Letters**

Many students improved their writing skills in the two letters they wrote and started to tell personal experiences or details about themselves that were unknown to the teachers. They added pictures and photos and started interacting as peers after exchanging some letters and taking part in the videoconferences. Since this project did not seek accuracy but communication, language abilities were not the main motivator in this situation but the curiosity and excitement of getting to know another teenager from another country with similar likes and dislikes were the stimuli that students needed to improve themselves.

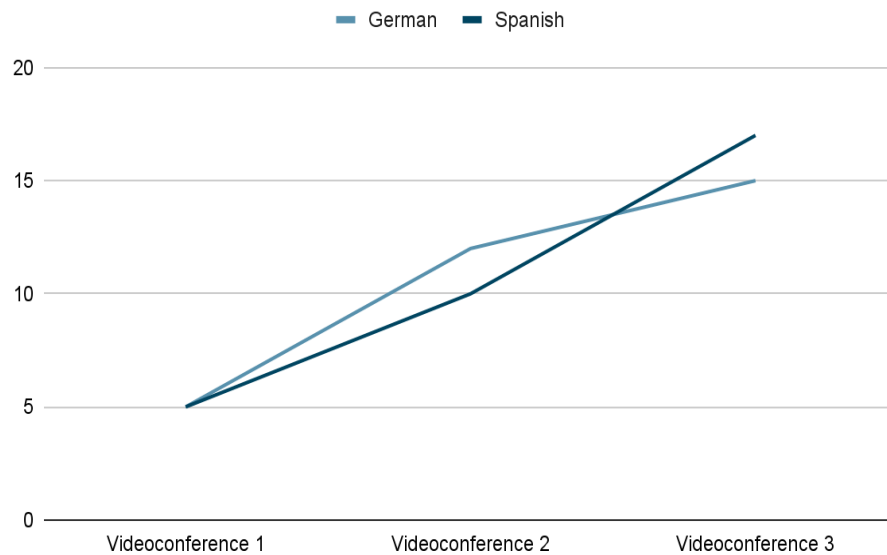
The answering time was significantly reduced. In the beginning, it took over two weeks to collect every letter, while for the last ones, only a few days were necessary. The deadlines to hand up the letters were proportionally shorter during the project. Students' results show that the reduction of the answering time means a higher engagement by students who slowly realise the real-life importance of English as a lingua franca and for their future since they live in a globalised world, and they might face situations in which they need English to communicate.

Since German students wrote their letters using a computer, without adding pictures and they were not very personal at the beginning, when the Spanish students received them, they were expecting pictures and hand-written letters. However, the second letter they received was more personal and they enjoyed reading it; they started moving around the classroom and reading other students' letters, and they commented about the pictures and the hobbies.

### **4.4 Video Presentation**

Since the purpose of the project was to motivate students to interact with other students, the teaching teams decided to develop three different videoconferences to measure their degree of motivation. The first videoconference showed some anxiety levels from students who were more introverted; however, as the extroverts led the conversation, they relaxed and participated spontaneously whenever the topic was interesting for them, or they were curious about something the other group said. Moreover, they felt supported as they were not alone talking to their partner but in bigger groups where there were collaborative interactions. After the first contact, every student intervened and contributed to the conversation during the second and third videoconferences. Figure 10 presents the number of questions asked by students from both centres in the three videoconferences that took place.





**Figure 10.** Number of questions asked in the videoconferences.

It is interesting to remark that the first videoconference was not very dynamic although they had previously prepared the questions. However, once they overcame their anxiety, they started asking questions because they were curious about anecdotes they read in their letters or simply because they wanted to know their partner better. Many of the questions asked were not prepared and came up with the conversation flow, and more students raised their hands because they wanted to participate in the videoconference.

During the videoconferences, every student participated, and even the most reluctant ones to speak in public asked a few questions not only to their partners but in general. Both Spanish and German students developed strategies to express themselves in every situation. However, German students were not as afraid of speaking as the Spanish ones, for they showed initiative during the conversations and had fewer problems with pronunciation. Some Spanish students were ashamed of their accents although their language knowledge was high.

This communication success is the motivational reward the students received, seeing during the videoconferences that they were able to maintain from a basic to an intermediate conversation with people who could not speak their language. This was the main reward they could obtain during the project rather than getting good grades.

#### 4.5 Social Network Edmodo

Introducing the social network Edmodo was decided only after the students had introduced themselves and teachers had the feeling the cooperation programme was correctly developing as students were not allowed to share private messages without the teachers reading them. However, if an Erasmus+ exchange takes place in the future, teachers cannot control every student's conversation; for this reason, Edmodo, as a social network with an educative objective, would be a first step for students to start chatting privately without using other social networks.

After explaining what the Erasmus+ project wants to achieve, students from both groups were interested in an exchange, where they could personally meet each other

and visit the other centre. Even the students who belonged to families with lower incomes were highly motivated to continue with the project and the exchange.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Although several recent studies have focused on the importance of fostering the students' motivation in class, none of these proposed an ICT cooperation project as we did. For example, [Tambunan's \(2018\)](#) study identified the teacher's role as the main motivator that influenced students' interests and motivation without paying attention to the use of information and communication technology.

The findings in [Drakulic's \(2019\)](#) study revealed that the teacher's instructional competence was perceived as the most important characteristic to increase motivation in class by the students. Finally, the results obtained in the study developed by [Ninkovic et al. \(2022\)](#) showed that students assigned a high motivational role to the use of computers although they did not propose any cooperation project.

Our ICT cooperation plan increased the students' motivation since they started to learn English in another way, not only to pass their exams but to communicate with other students. The real interaction that took place through the videoconferences and the Edmodo platform increased their ability to learn, understand and produce English outcomes. Furthermore, the attention paid to the teachers increased, and class participation changed drastically. This showed that their degree of motivation increased showing some of the characteristics of motivated students, such as self-esteem, goal-achievement, and tolerance to frustration, which validates our research statement and its originality.

Participating in online social interactions through the Edmodo platform helped the students to learn English as a foreign language without being actively conscious of their learning process since it was happening fluently and indirectly. The willingness to communicate was higher during the videoconferences and the anxiety levels were reduced once they had already interacted the first time.

The students with special needs found the project also motivating despite needing some support during the activities on the part of the teachers, and the videoconferences were challenging. However, during the third videoconference, and one question was directed to one of them, one student wanted to know how school life was for her, and she gladly shared her perspective with some help from the teacher. It was emotional when the students applauded her after her reply.

There were many cultural differences students were unaware of while writing their letters. For example, the Spanish students wrote about the Spanish tradition of Easter. This tradition was shocking for some German students, and they had to ask them for more information so they could understand the meaning; this process is also known as cultural meaning negotiation. Spanish students proceeded to explain this tradition, sent pictures, and engaged their readers with questions. Finally, students from both centres reflected on the cultural differences between both countries.

Being able to identify and value their traditions and culture was another result of this study. Students realised their cultural richness and treasured traditions that were previously taken for granted. Developing an online relationship increases their sensitivity, develops their emotional intelligence, and engages students in producing deeper conversations with their partners.

This communicative instructional setting, where language is learned through teachers' guidance and natural communicative situations, showed a positive impact on students who were used to learning English only focusing on grammar structures and lists of vocabulary. They used the language in real communicative contexts, and they were able to focus on the message rather than on the accuracy. This change of perspective enabled them to relax and produce even more in English than they thought they could do. Once students realised how much they knew and how extensive their performance could be, their motivation and willingness to learn also increased.

Some negative aspects of this project are that it takes some time from classical classes, where the teacher explains grammar and students are asked to answer exercises and do mechanical tasks. Some teachers prefer to follow their teaching plan and a project like this one would interfere with it. Finding time to write and correct the letters, do the videoconferences, or meet with other teachers means some extra work for teachers, who are not always interested in spending more time than necessary on school-related stuff.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Motivation is a key factor for language learning success. Engaging students in an ICT cooperation project with other teenagers depicts the importance of learning English as a lingua franca. As a result of this project, communicative competence improved in most of the students who participated in the videoconferences. By using real material, such as letters, pictures, and videoconferences, students felt connected to the task and were curious about the other group of students. Comprehending the cultural differences and developing empathy through interaction with others were relevant throughout the project duration. Intercultural competencies were developed every time students learned new traditions from different countries, and they accepted the differences between cultures.

This project not only achieved the fact that students spoke in English in public without fear and shared their opinions, but it accomplished that the students completed all these tasks in a foreign language that they did not consider essential before starting the project. It requires further research in terms of assessing the students' motivation before starting the project. To begin with, the individual characteristics of every student should have been taken deeply into consideration to avoid negative consequences such as the one that happened in this study. To improve this, teachers should mention every student's background during the initial meeting where they discussed the objectives. Moreover, using an adequate questionnaire to evaluate the willingness to participate and engage in the project could help in future lines of research since the questions examined motivation from a more profound point of view and they also address anxiety produced by oral interaction.

Videoconferences should be recorded to help teachers evaluate the engagement of each student. What is more, recording them would help students improve as they will be able to perceive their errors or mistakes and therefore correct themselves. For the teachers taking part in this project, regular online meetings would have helped the communication regarding different topics. For example, students' backgrounds, progress, or motivation, as in this study only one teacher oversaw analysing the results of the whole project.

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