



Facultade de Filoloxía

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

**Teachers' and learners' beliefs
in the acquisition of English
as a foreign language**

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SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

Título: TEACHERS' AND LEARNERS' BELIEFS IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

In the context of the acquisition of English as a foreign language, the beliefs that teachers and students bring with them to the learning/teaching situation have been shown to be an important factor in the learning process. A number of studies have identified these beliefs and explored their potential impact on English language learning and teaching.

The aim of my dissertation is to study how the teachers and learners beliefs and attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language can influence the process of acquisition of the English language and, therefore, the level of proficiency of the learners. In order to do so, I will first do a literature review on the matter to collect information, analyse what methods have been used in previous research to study this topic, and the conclusions of different authors, and hence have an external insight about the situation.

Secondly, I will carry out my own empirical investigation, where I will gather my own data by means of a questionnaire what will be sent to secondary English teachers and students. I also intend, if possible, to complete the data collection by interviewing a small number of teachers. The interviews will help me look into some aspects that may not have been included in the questionnaire. I intend to use a questionnaire that has been used in previous studies, but I will add some questions that will allow me to explore the relationship between teachers' and students' beliefs and some other variables, for example, home background, cultural background, previous learning/teaching experiences among others.

Santiago de Compostela, 7 de novembro de 2018.

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1. Introduction

According to Kalaja and Barcelos (2003:1) “beliefs can be broadly defined as opinions and ideas that learners (and teachers) have about the task of learning a second/foreign language”.

Although there is a lot to say in the investigation of beliefs and many questions to answer in relation to them, language learning beliefs have been extensively researched over the last decades and there were uncountable studies focused on the interference of them in the development of language learning. One of the final goals of these studies is to give light to those hidden reasons why that process of learning is not successful enough and thus make participants and readers conscious of the implications behind language learning.

A periodical production of these studies is very important, so they must be done from time to time if we want to satisfy learners’ necessities and improve their performance. Based on real facts, studies show the origin of the problems of education successfulness and through their elaboration professionals get to see those points which they must improve in order to guide English education to a better future.

Their topic has varied throughout time, from those that are about either teachers’ or learners’ ideas to those that are concerned with the relation between both groups. On the other hand, some of them are interested in confirming the existence of certain beliefs, some others in the why of the presence of those beliefs and there are also those that aim at offering possible solutions against wrong ideas that are placed in our minds.

The present study aims at investigating the degree of influence of teachers’ and learners’ beliefs in the successfulness in English learning that learners achieve. My contribution is to give insight of some of the ideas about beliefs that have been emphasized along the years and then to do a small-scale study that can help me to corroborate those ideas and see to what extent participants’ beliefs have an impact on language learning. In this way, it is intended to answer two main questions: 1) is there agreement between teachers and learners regarding preferences of activities in language learning?, 2) to what extent do aptitude, motivation and strategies beliefs have impact on the successfulness of learners in language learning?

In order to do so, different sources will work as guides of this research. Among many of them, I consider fundamental three:

First of all, Lourdes Ortega's book titled *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, in which chapters 7, 8 and 9 focus on three of the dimensions that the author see more determining in the process of learning: aptitude, motivation and affect. Lourdes talks in the first one about the misinterpretation of the term 'aptitude' in relation to language learning and raises the questions of what aptitude actually means and how our self-valuations or the valuations of others have an impact on our success in learning languages. Regarding motivation, the qualities of what would be the most motivated learner are commented and some of the common antecedents of that motivation are listed. Finally, the chapter on affect deals with kinds of personalities that have been studied along the years and have been identified with either positive or negative results in language learning and it also introduces the close relationship between affective features in learners and their selection of strategies.

Secondly, Mathew Peacock's study *Exploring the gap between teachers' and learners' beliefs about useful activities for EFL* in 1998 is the starting point of the research of the first question. His investigation deals with teachers and learners beliefs about appropriate language learning strategies and his methodology constitutes the first little part of my study.

Finally, a second study carried out by E.K. Horwitz in 1988 called *The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students* serves to complete the methodology used in the present study. This one is about the presence of beliefs in learners that have to do with the aspects of aptitude, motivation and affect developed in the first main source and how they work on the process of learning languages. Adapted to the content of the second research question, it helps to analyze the relationship of these beliefs with the academic proficiency of learners in English.

Regarding the parts of this study, comments on these three sources among others are part of the second chapter of the essay, 'The literature review'. As I introduce above, a broad understanding of beliefs from theoretical and practical approaches is presented in this section in order to explain what they are and demonstrate with real facts what they cause.

Following that, the section called ‘The study’ is divided in four different parts. The first one introduces and describes what I want to demonstrate with my research, the questions I want to answer and what I expect to obtain. The second deals with the description of the subjects that participate in the investigation, how the questionnaires were delivered and how the information was treated. The third is a detailed description of the two original questionnaires in comparison with the changes made to them in order to be used in the present study. Finally, the last one is an extensive discussion of the results obtained in both questionnaires following their original structure.

The fourth and last chapter of the essay called ‘Discussion, conclusions and suggestions for further research’ deals with the main findings of the investigation, not only those obtained through the analysis of the results of the study, but also through the reading of the sources included in the literature review. It shows how the latter made possible an understanding of beliefs that facilitated the treatment of the same in a posterior practical study.

At the very end, a list of all the references consulted and an appendix with the questionnaires delivered to participants are provided.

2. Literature review

In her manual *Understanding second language acquisition*, Lourdes Ortega (2013) discusses extensively different factors that affect directly the acquisition of a foreign language. She answers why people differ so much in the successfulness of their process of learning a foreign language and which are the aspects that mostly influence it.

First, she dedicates one of her chapters to examine aptitude, that along with motivation, “are the two best-researched sources of individual differences in L2 learning” (2013:145). Also, a third chapter deals with the impact of our own emotions and temperament, that belongs to what is called the affectional area. By studying these three dimensions, we can understand to what extent a psychological examination of subjects is crucial for a good understanding of their actions in the process of learning a language and how psychology directly affects the way people behave and succeed in languages.

Throughout the years, the psychological field has evolved with respect to the naming given to these different factors involved in language learning. Aptitude towards a foreign language is more recently defined as learners’ cognition, motivation is substituted by the term conation and affect keeps the name. Lourdes Ortega (2013:146) establishes the differences between them and explains that “cognition refers to how information is processed and learned by the human mind; conation addresses how humans use will and freedom to make choices that result in new behaviors; and affect encompasses issues of temperament, emotions and how humans feel towards information, people, objects, actions and thoughts.”

Yet, both modern psychologists and SLA researchers have the intention to investigate second language acquisition paying attention to the particular and complex relationships that presumably exist between these three interconnected dimensions. Thus, in the practical section of this study, some connections will be established between learners’ beliefs that, although neither resemble nor belong to the same dimension, they certainly go hand in hand among a great amount of subjects.

Considering that most of the beliefs used in the second questionnaire of the study are concerned with the aptitude, the motivation and the affective patterns of learners, a deeper explanation of these dimensions is crucial to understand their relationship.

According to Lourdes Ortega (2013), there is no agreement among researchers with the definition of aptitude towards language, since “much less effort has been invested in explaining the construct than in developing tests that measure it, and partly because until recently the relevant research has attempted in vain to isolate cognitive abilities from other conative, affective and contextual affordances” (2013:149). Roughly speaking, aptitude towards languages defines how efficient people are at learning them and it is measured through a evaluation of the different activities that are involved in the process of learning a language. Still, aptitude cannot be reduced to this definition, both because people associate ‘aptitude’ with abilities that do not mean the same, for instance quality and speediness; and because aptitude is highly dependent of motivational and affective beliefs and not an isolated term.

Hence, measuring the level of aptitude of learners by looking at their grades should be done taking into account many factors that play an important role in the construction of the language aptitude in each individual. Although studies confirm that it is possible to find a relationship between aptitude and proficiency in learners, both specialists and common people must understand for instance what they mean when they say that someone has a special gift for learning foreign languages. Are they referring to the speediness of learning or to the quality? Also, is the reason of the success that they are actually intelligent or that they were already talented in their first language and they found easier to acknowledge a second language? This kind of questions, among many others, appear as subtypes of beliefs or as different explanations of aptitude. As they must be answered if we want to be clear about everything the concept of aptitude implies, some of them are part of this study.

With regard to the differential debate between aptitude-intelligence-first language ability, Lourdes Ortega (2013:151) also presents this issue as not completely resolved. In the case of the connection between aptitude and intelligence, on the one hand, Marjorie Wesche (1981) demonstrated that participants with the highest scores of aptitude also showed significantly higher scores of intelligence. Nevertheless, Skehan (1998) stated that intelligence coincides with foreign language aptitude due to correlations between intelligence tests and grammatical sensitivity in L2 tests, but not for all the components of language learning. In the same way, Robert Sternberg (2002) sees deceptive the similarities between intelligence tests and grammar tests. He states that the same insufficient abilities that are taken into account to measure traditional

intelligence are also part of aptitude tests like the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), that deals with the construct of grammar sensitivity.

On the other hand, in the case of the debate between L2 aptitude and L1 ability, Skehan (1986) concluded with his study that although some specific aptitudes in the foreign language learning, such as grammatical ones, certainly correlated with L1 ability, L1 ability and aptitude in general towards a foreign language are two different factors.

In conclusion, these three factors (L2 aptitude, intelligence and L1 ability) are interrelated to some extent due to the appearance of some mutual aspects between them, but at the same time they can and must be investigated separately.

Secondly, motivation has become matter of investigation for psychologists more recently, making human conation an important area that must be considered along with cognition, since our intentions, goals and commitments are crucial to understand the individual differences that distance people when learning a foreign language. According to Lourdes Ortega (2013:168) the term refers to “the desire to initiate L2 learning and the effort employed to sustain it, and in lay terms we all understand it to be a matter of quantity, as in the everyday observation that some learners are highly motivated and other have little or no motivation”.

Most of the studies use Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) as an instrument to measure motivation. The socio-educational model, one of the most dominant models of foreign language learning, created by Gardner and Lambert in 1972, focuses on three of its dimensions. The first one is how much effort people need to make in order to learn the language, the second is how much enjoyment people show to feel when learning the language and the third is how much investment in being successful people demonstrate. According to Gardner (2001:6) “the truly motivated individual scores high on all three dimensions.”

While one of the main concerns in motivation research is to firmly evidence that different levels of motivations lead to different levels of achievements, Lourdes Ortega (2013:170) believes that it is even more productive to be able to discover which are the factors or variables that help to increase or decrease the quantity of motivation. These ones are called antecedents, and integrativeness is the most relevant. Over the last decades the term has caused a lot of criticism since some scholars do not see it appropriate. Gardner

(2001:5) describes it as “a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community” and according to him, the term involves three dimensions: 1) favorable attitudes towards L2 speakers, 2) general interest in foreign languages and low ethnocentrism and 3) endorsement of reasons for learning the L2 related to interaction with L2 members or an integrative orientation.

In this way, Gardner (2001) uses the term ‘integrative motivation’ to refer to those learners who manifest the highest level of motivation, for which three principles should be fulfilled. First, the antecedent of integrativeness that, as I said before, can differ according to three dimensions; second, the quantity of motivation, which corresponds with a notable combination of effort, enjoyment and investment; and finally, positive attitudes in relation to the learning situation, which refers to teachers and curriculum in the instructional setting. Still, the epitome of highest motivation toward the learning of a foreign language has been identified in many other ways. Kaplan (1993), for instance, has found subjects whose level of integrativeness is so extreme that they desire to be dislocated from their L1 community and behave like a person from the L2 community. In this way, ‘integrative motivation’ would cover all the motivational factors seen so far.

Furthermore, Ortega (2013:173) describes two additional antecedents that are relevant in the study of motivation. One is orientations, reasons for learning the L2; and the other is attitudes, that involve both how learners behave towards the L2 community and its speakers and against the learning situation just mentioned above.

The analysis of orientations is advantageous because it provides us with insight into the aims of the subjects and how they will affect the intensity and quality of their motivation. These orientations are not exclusive and the same individual can be moved by more than one reason. The most repeated according to Lourdes Ortega (2013:173) are the following ones:

1. Instrumental, when pragmatic and utilitarian reasons are important, such as getting a better job or pursuing a higher level of education in the L2.
2. For knowledge or enlightened understanding of one’s own identity, language or culture and to become a more knowledgeable person.
3. To facilitate travel to other countries or parts of a country.

4. For fostering general friendship with members of the target language.
5. For integrative reasons related to identification with the target culture and a genuine desire to become more like members of the L2 group.

Moreover, different kinds of attitudes serve to complete the list of the most significant antecedents used to investigate the diversity of students with regard to their motivation. What attitudes involve constitutes the psychological term of 'sociocultural milieu'. These attitudes are created by the different social settings in which the students are joined (classroom, family, neighborhood or any other social group) and their correspondent collective beliefs, behaviors and values. "My parents stressed the importance English would have for me when I left school" is a good example of an item that could be analyzed.

Finally, personal affections is the last dimension that Lourdes Ortega (2013) takes into consideration. Along with aptitude and motivation, it is crucial for a theoretical understanding of the process of acquisition of a foreign language. Again, it will be seen how personal affections are wholly influenced by the two previous ones despite the fact that it has been traditionally understood as a set of independent emotional features.

The question that Ortega (2013) first raises is to what extent personality influences the process of learning a language and how it can be determining in subjects' self-considerations towards languages. According to her (2013:193), "personality can be conceived of as stable traits or qualities in a person, as more dynamic moods that are related to the cognitive processing of emotions, or even as predispositions that have been learned through social experience".

Throughout time three main personality models have been established in SLA research. The first one by Eysenck in 1964 does have its main focus on temperament and deals with three different traits of personality: stability-neuroticism, that deals with how we behave under pressure, that is, humans either get to keep calm or get stressed easily and how often they show signs of embarrassment or pessimism; extraversion-introversion, that basically measures both social and inward interest by measuring sweat, skin conductance and brain waves; and psychoticism, that describes either the level of propensity to act aggressively or to be tolerant, logic and objective.

The second model was made by Myers and Briggs in 1985 and is focused on the preferred ways of processing information, emphasizing the correlation between cognition and affect. In their case, four traits are developed: extraversion-introversion, that is already treated in Eysenck's model; feeling-thinking, similar to Eysenck's psychoticism; perceiving-judging, that reflects levels of proximity to goals, plans and organization; and intuiting-sensing, that differentiates a holistic from a realistic perception of stimuli. Finally, the third and last model by Costa and McCrae in 1992, called the Big Five Model, is the most frequently used at present due to the fact that it combines the other two. The traits it develops, that are already described, have a different naming: emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience.

Having classified the different models and its respective differentiation of personalities, the question that follows is if successful language learners are unequivocally and substantially related to a specific kind of the personalities we have seen. Moody (1988) carried out an investigation using Myers-Briggs model and comparing the responses of their subjects with those investigated by the creator of the model three years before. The results of the investigation showed a large number of subjects that mixed intuiting and thinking personalities, students that were good not only at tasks such as memorization, establishing associations and reading between lines, but also were able to work analytically and logically. Also, regarding the opposition extraversion-introversion, it was found that an unexpected high number of introverts is involved in the study of languages, therefore, there is an equal balance between introverts and extroverts in language learning.

On the other hand, Ludo Verhoeven and Anne Vermeer (2002) used the Big Five Model in order to investigate if there was correlation not only between language learning and a repetitive personality of the students, but also between successfulness in that learning and human personality. Some teachers were asked to observe their students and evaluate them according to their responses to statements that dealt with the five personality traits presented in the Big Five Model. In order to define communicative competence, three types were differentiated: organizational, pragmatic and strategic competence. The results showed that the personality trait of openness to experience, that in Myers-Briggs Model is referred to as Intuiting-Sensing opposition, was the most closely related to the three dimensions of communicative competence. Extraversion was only connected to pragmatic and strategic dimensions, while conscientiousness to organization. In a different way, emotional stability and agreeableness, that corresponds with the trait of thinking previously

appreciated by Myers-Briggs model, were not associated with any dimension that constituted communicative competence.

Another aspect of the process of learning a language in which we again perceive how cognitive and affective patterns work together and are often difficult to distinguish from one another is the selection of our learning strategies. Lourdes Ortega (2013:208) defines strategies as “conscious mental and behavioral procedures that people engage in with the aim to gain control over their learning process”. They were first studied in the 1970’s and the main goal around their investigation was, as it happens to other factors, to find connections between specific ways of studying and posterior successfulness. Thus, they were included along with aptitude and motivation in a line of investigation known as “the good language learner research”. In 1975, Joan Rubin enumerated a series of attributes related to strategic behavior that would best describe a good learner:

1. They are good guessers
2. They pay analytical attention to form but also attend to meaning
3. They try out their new knowledge
4. They monitor their production and that of others
5. They constantly practise
6. They cope well with feelings of vulnerability for the sake of putting themselves in situations where they communicate and learn.

L2 learning strategies keep being studied decades later, be by observation-based research programs or using questionnaires. In the mid-1980’s there was a first attempt to classify certain language strategies paying attention to what activities people used to learn. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) carried out one of the most important projects concerning strategies in which they generated a list of learning strategies classified into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive and social-affective. They also stated that learners’ selection of strategies could be usually influenced by the course objectives established by teachers, by their own motivation and by the task itself, showing an important lack of autonomy.

Later in the 1990’s, a different instrument to analyze strategic behavior that we will see later on in one of the studies was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), made by Oxford in 1990. It was also made up of different strategic behaviors that were, at the same time, constituted by several tasks of their

type. Their names were affective, social, metacognitive, cognitive, memory-related and compensatory, and they were related with different kinds of activities.

Once that we have seen how the roles of aptitude, motivation and affect in language learning have been approached along the years, acting as the main factors that influence learners' attitude towards language, there are some specific studies from which very useful practice information can be extracted. Their theoretical sides give insight into the common implications of learners and teachers on the successfulness of learning a language and their practical approaches offer different methods to use.

First of all, Mathew Peacock's *Exploring the gap between teachers' and learners' beliefs about useful activities for EFL* (1998) is a good starting point to comment one of the central issues in which this study is focused on: the discrepancy in learners' and teachers' beliefs. Peacock aims at investigating the why of the differences between both groups and whether they substantially affect the process of learning.

Peacock (1998:236) makes clear the idea that although most of the studies carried out so far were not useful in the sense that they merely showed the differences between teachers and learners, it is true that over the years a big concern about this issue has increased on the linguistic field. Some specialists such as himself have done a deeper research attempting to clarify the reasons of the problematic gap, the implications of the gap in the proficiency of the learners and the possible solutions to it.

He collected responses from 158 EFL students and 30 EFL teachers in a Hong Kong University by means of a questionnaire and an interview commented below, and he concluded that a clear mismatch between the beliefs of both groups existed. According to his results, learners are much more fond of traditional language activities such as grammar exercises and error correction, whereas teachers give more importance to the improvement of communication that can be trained with a daily use of pair and group activities. Moreover, different scholars such as Kern (1995), Horwitz (1988), Cathcart & Olsen (1976) and McCargar (1993) corroborated the idea that learners have an unquestionable preference for activities in class that do not imply any instance of communication with their classmates.

The main stimulus that encouraged Peacock to conduct this research was the question that Nunan had raised in 1988 and also the method he had used to find answers: "What, then, do learners think are

legitimate learning activities, and how do these compare with the perceptions of the teachers who instruct them? Along with Willing, Nunan (1988) gave students and teachers a questionnaire in which they had to rate ten specific activities taking into account what was their degree of usefulness. His results below (Table 1), supported at the same time by other studies, showed again the information that Peacock would reaffirm on his remake:

Table 1. Nunan's (1988) results for usefulness of ESL activities.

| ACTIVITY | STUDENT RATING | TEACHER RATING |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE | VERY HIGH | MEDIUM |
| EXPLANATIONS TO CLASS | VERY HIGH | HIGH |
| CONVERSATION PRACTICE | VERY HIGH | VERY HIGH |
| ERROR CORRECTION | VERY HIGH | LOW |
| VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT | VERY HIGH | HIGH |
| LISTENING TO/USING CASSETTES | LOW | MEDIUM HIGH |
| STUDENT SELF-DISCOVERY OF ERRORS | LOW | VERY HIGH |
| USING PICTURES/FILMS/VIDEO | LOW | LOW MEDIUM |
| PAIR WORK | LOW | VERY HIGH |
| LANGUAGE GAMES | VERY LOW | LOW |

As an extension of this rating-questionnaire, Peacock (1998:238) added a brief interview in his experiment in order to explore the differences found. Students' interview included these two questions: 1) which two activities (not limited on the questionnaire) they felt were most useful in EFL classes and 2) exactly what they understood by the categories on the questionnaire - for example 'conversation practice'. Teachers' interview included these four: 1) when you teach EFL, which two activities (not limited to those on the questionnaire) do you find to be most valuable?, 2) why do you think the differences between learner and teacher views on the relative usefulness of activities might occur?, 3) do you think the differences are significant for the learning process? and 4) how can these differences be eliminated? In addition to the evident discrepancy in the beliefs of the two groups, Peacock could thus draw some conclusions about them both with the contributions of other scholars and through the responses given to the personal interviews.

Regarding the why of those differences, Peacock (1998:243) first enumerated a series of reasons previously proposed. Horwitz (1985:336) and Kern (1995:77), among others, believed that “students acquire their beliefs from their previous learning experiences, particularly in classrooms utilizing grammar translation and audio-lingual methods”, that is to say, these experiences are influential for students that reflect their preferences based on what teachers have taught them over the years. Christison & Krahnke (1986:75), on the other hand, explained that the refusal of certain communicative activities could be due to either a lack of instantaneous results, because learners could not see immediately their progress as if they were correcting grammar exercises; or the embarrassment of being listened to by their classmates. In fact, Peacock found in his study comments in the responses of the teachers such as “students feel abandoned when they work in groups...feel their errors are not corrected”. Finally, Willing (1988:113) insisted on the idea that students are moved by their needs more than their preferences, so the most difficult tasks are what they are most interested in.

Concerning the possibility that these differences affect learning, Horwitz (1988:292) and Kern (1995:81) agree with the idea that a mismatch between teachers and learners can lead to a lack of commitment from the learners because they do not feel motivated and confident in class; they become frustrated and reluctant to participate in some activities. Besides, 70% of the teachers interviewed by Peacock (1998) supported this idea. “There’s a barrier which affects willingness to learn and learning” or “it definitely can slow down their learning...students want grammar, but don’t get it, they can feel frustrated” are instances of their comments.

Finally, different scholars such as Horwitz (1988) or Kern (1995) assert that the gap could be shortened if the relationship between teachers and learners is closer. Teachers should explain their reasons to use certain activities and the benefits they imply and they can also compensate students with the use of a methodology with which they feel comfortable. One of the suggestions of the teachers in the questionnaire is to “educate students in the value of group work...and be very careful to make all students active within groups”.

Another via that Peacock (1998:246) emphasizes in order to reduce the gap is a more learner-centered approach in which students are more autonomous when studying a language and can choose their own activities. This solution sounds contradictory related to that one of a further explanation of the

worthiness of activities from teachers. We have seen that both groups have very different interests, so if we give to one of them the possibility to choose and reinforce the use of certain activities, we would be simultaneously excluding the opinion and preferences of the other one. Then, considering that the mismatch between them is clear, we should first educate them in a class environment in which they realize from the very beginning that the use of communicative activities will be beneficial for them in the future, and also listen to their preferences in order to make the process of learning more effective. It is all about finding the balance between opposed perspectives and a way to improve the future proficiency.

These tensions are also matter of study in *English as a “global language” in China: An investigation into learners’ and teachers’ language beliefs*, an investigation run by Lin Pan and David Block in 2011. Three out of seven beliefs that are included in their questionnaire and their answers are relevant to understand the problematic we have been dealing with.

The first two beliefs are “The current English education in schools and universities is exam oriented” and “The current English exam emphasizes more on the grasp of English grammar.” Answers to both of them show a considerable agreement between learners and teachers with these statements. Almost 70% of both groups agree or strongly agree with the second one. This could explain some decisions and preferences students show towards language. The CET 4 is an exam in China that all university students are required to do. Speaking is not part of this test. According to Littlewood (1981), “the absence of a speaking test contributed to the consequence that Chinese students are not good speakers and they are often reticent learners who lack the willingness to communicate verbally”. Yu (1984:35) even compares the situation as someone who has money in a bank during a long time and spends it later, meaning that your grammatical knowledge is on you, but you do not use it.

We see similar cases in Spain. Secondary schools examinations are based on grammar and vocabulary exercises, and listening and writing activities that are also included in the tests that give access to universities. However, speaking is neither part of those tests nor frequently practiced in secondary lessons. This kind of orientation of language learning from schools and universities clearly reduce the interest of the learners towards communicative activities. An increasing speaking-oriented English education would bring a better attitude and a greater interest in these activities from learners. Sometimes what teachers think and do is

even contradictory. They want learners to dare to speak in English and they do not give the facilities in class to obtain a better level of speaking in the long term.

The third item is called “The English education my students/I receive meets their/my expectations and needs.” The contrast reflected in the responses is shocking. While only 20.8% of students agree or strongly agree, 62.7% of teachers do it. Only 6.7% of teachers recognize that English education is not satisfactory for students. This explains again the lack of understanding between teachers and learners and the different perspectives they have about language learning.

Now, regarding autonomy in learning, Boud (1988:23) says “the main characteristic of autonomy as an approach to learning is that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction.” Sara Cotterall in her approach titled *Readiness for autonomy: investigating learning beliefs* (1995) tries to promote the idea that students’ beliefs have actually demonstrated in most cases that they are already prepared to take control of their learning. In her study she uses factor analysis in order to detect covariation in the items of her questionnaire and then create specific factors based on those clusters of items. One of the factors was ‘learner independence’ and it was made up of three beliefs: “I have a clear idea of what I need English for”, “I like trying new things out by myself” and “Learning a language is very different from learning other subjects”. The covariance between these beliefs means that the same students that see themselves as capable of learning independently are the ones that perceive that learning a language is a different task from learning any other subject. This means that learners with the initiative to learn on their own are conscious of the needs that the process of learning implies and then are prepared to face them.

After seeing some studies describing factors that play an important role in the issue of a misunderstanding between teachers and learners preferences, there are other approaches that deal with specific beliefs in learners that can be crucial for their later successfulness. In his study *The beliefs about Language Learning of Beginning University Foreign Language Students* (1988), Elaine K. Horwitz used his own method called The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), that will constitute the second part of this study. It was followed by many other linguistics scholars because it covers a wide range of learners’ beliefs and helps answer many different questions.

Influences from different areas can have a significant impact on learners' ideas about language acquisition. We have already seen how a determinate exams system of a country can lead students to consider specific activities as the most important ones to have an effective language learning. With regard to learners beliefs, especially those included in conative and affectional dimension, something similar happens. For instance, students receive very contradictory information about how much time they need to learn a language. Nowadays, there are many applications on our smartphones and computers that guarantee to fulfill the necessities to get a good level of a foreign language. At the same time, bad habits in language learning can turn into beliefs such as learning a language is a kind of special gift that only a few have, as if it were something innate. According to Holec (1981:27), "language learners must go through a sort of psychological preparation or 'deconditioning' to rid themselves of preconceived notions and prejudices which would likely interfere with their language learning".

These beliefs, among many others, are considered determinant in BALLI method for the analysis of the posterior success of learners. Its variety of beliefs makes it the best instrument to find possible correlations between specific beliefs and academic results in students. It is made up of 34 beliefs divided in 5 different thematic areas. It will be explained deeply in Methodology section.

As Lourdes Ortega (2013) highlights, another point on which learners' beliefs are very influential is the selection of language learning strategies. Certain beliefs about what is important to learn can make students adopt some specific strategies instead of others that are required for different goals. In her study *The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use* (1999), Nae-Dong Yang describes the different goals and correspondent strategies that students use when learning.

The selection of strategies seems to be the last step before starting to learn. First, there are initial wrong preconceptions that create some beliefs. Second, these beliefs determine how students deal with languages, in other words, their strategies. There are different reasons in the case of strategy use. Horwitz (1987) emphasizes previous experiences of learners and also cultural backgrounds, while Bandura (1986) says that "people undertake and perform confidently activities that they judge themselves capable of managing, but they avoid those they believe exceed their ability". This psychologist also talks about the importance of self-efficacy beliefs in learners. Those who have a stronger sense of it tend to hold on much more time because they believe in becoming successful one day.

On the other hand, strategy use was also compared with motivation or conation aspect. Pintrich (1989) divides students' motivation in three components: expectancy, value and affect. Expectancy means what students expect from themselves; value refers to how much importance or usefulness students think the task does have; and affect describes how we react when doing the task, for instance if we get stressed. He associated the first two components with the use and knowledge of different kinds of strategies, whereas the affective component, if negative, is related to an inadequate practice of what would be a self-regulated learning, that is to say, a learner capable of controlling their thinking and their efforts when learning.

All these factors that affect in some way our use of strategies towards languages were analyzed by Nae-Dong Yang (1999) in her study. Her methodology was a bit complex. She mixed two different systems: BALLI and SILL.

In the case of BALLI, she obtained by means of a factor analysis 4 factors different from those that appear in BALLI. These factors, corroborated by other studies, were: 1) self-efficacy and expectation about learning English, 2) perceived value and nature of learning spoken English, 3) beliefs about foreign language aptitude and 4) beliefs about formal structural studies.

On the other hand, she did a similar thing with SILL items. She identified six different factors that were associated with six kinds of strategies: 1) functional practice strategies, 2) cognitive-memory strategies, 3) metacognitive strategies, 4) formal oral-practice strategies, 5) social strategies and 6) compensation strategies. Functional practice strategies consisted of activities out of the class that students make an effort to develop, such as watching TV in English or attending tandems; cognitive-memory strategies involved mechanisms through which students associate new ideas with knowledge that is already in their minds; metacognitive strategies were those that are useful for learners to manage the control of the learning by means of planning or evaluating it; formal oral-practice strategies were related to the practice of speaking English; social strategies had to do with the participation of other people, for instance asking for help from other students; and compensation strategies involved those reactions of students when it comes to new knowledge for them. In this way, a high rate on belief 88. 'I think about my progress in learning English' would mean a great use of metacognitive strategies.

After taking this data separately, Nae-Dong Yang (1999) put together the results of both questionnaires and found correlations between beliefs and strategies. 'Self-efficacy and expectation about learning' and 'perceived value and nature of learning spoken English' were identified with the use of all six strategies. Then, 'beliefs about foreign language aptitude' was related to functional practice, cognitive-memory and metacognitive strategies. The last factor 'beliefs about formal structural studies' is strongly disconnected from the use of functional strategies, meaning that students that are fond of grammar, vocabulary and memorization practice do not contemplate language from a functional perspective, therefore, do not try to speak or think in English. On the other hand, 'perceived value and nature of learning spoken English' is highly associated with the use of formal oral-practice strategies, since its beliefs are related to speaking activity.

Based on her results and literature review, her final conclusions were that beliefs could be divided into two broad dimensions: one metacognitive and another motivational. Generally speaking, beliefs included in the first and second factors were more motivational and the third and fourth factors were more metacognitive, being the first two ones much more influential than the last two in the use of learning strategies.

3. The study

3.1 Objectives, research questions and hypotheses

Taking Mathew Peacock's approach *Exploring the gap between teachers' and learners' beliefs about 'useful' activities for EFL* and Horwitz' *The Beliefs about Language Learning of Beginning University Foreign Language Students* as the basis of the study, a combinatory questionnaire (Appendix) was designed in order to research first the apparent divergence between learners' and teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of certain learning activities; and second the possible relationship between learners' beliefs about their aptitude, motivation and strategies in language learning and the level of successfulness in their schools. Answers to these two questions can also relate to each other, since certain beliefs can result in specific preferences of activities.

In this way, this study aims at answering two main questions: 1) is there agreement between teachers and learners regarding preferences of activities in language learning?, 2) to what extent do aptitude, motivation and strategies beliefs have impact on the successfulness of learners in language learning?

Following the theoretical ideas of different scholars, especially Lourdes Ortega (2013), and the results shared by different studies, it is expected to find first a crucial disagreement among the beliefs about learning activities' usefulness, being students more traditional and teachers more willing to practice communication; and second a close relationship between aptitude, motivation, strategies beliefs and success in L2 learning, since beliefs about our readiness to learn a language, external factors that motivate us to do it and opinions on specific learning strategies were considered to play an important role in the proficiency of students.

3.2 Method and procedures

The study was designed to analyze the contrast between teachers and learners of the same language centre. It was sent to IES San Mamede (Maceda, Ourense) and distributed among 60 students, 41 females and 19 males, who were in the second semester of fourth secondary year and bachelors. Their age is between 14 and 19. As the number of English teachers was not enough to reach the minimum to draw reliable conclusions, the questionnaire was also sent to IES O Couto (Ourense) and covered by 4 more teachers.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study on the first page. They were also required to specify age and gender before filling in the questionnaires. These details may play an important role in some beliefs of the questionnaire. Besides, students were also asked about their last grade in English to take into account their most recent evaluation; table 2 shows their percentages. Students were finally enumerated to avoid possible subjects' confusions.

Table 2. Students' grades in English in the last semester.

| GRADES | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|----------|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|----|
| STUDENTS | 2 % | 7 % | 10 % | 20 % | 10 % | 22 % | 5 % | 15 % | 10 % | - |

Regarding the collection of results, the questionnaires were delivered in paper and participants completed them in class. Later, no statistics program was used to analyze the data. Calculations of means and detection of correlations were done manually with tables in paper that facilitated the visual comprehension of results.

3.3 Questionnaires

The study is composed of two questionnaires. As these are oriented to answer different questions, teachers were only asked to respond to the second one.

The first questionnaire is based on Nunan's 1988 research and it aims at comparing the preferences of activities in class of students and teachers. As I said before, the research was used by Matthew Peacock in 1998, who made some changes in activities. He dropped the activity of 'language games' and added 'grammar exercises' and 'group work'. My questionnaire is made up of the same 11 activities that Peacock included in his and with the same order: 'pronunciation practice', 'explanations to class', 'conversation practice', 'error correction', 'vocabulary development', 'listening to/using cassettes', 'self-discovery of errors', 'using pictures/films/video', 'pair work', 'group work and grammar exercises'. The reason is that 'language games' is not part of the EFL context in IES San Mamede and the last two activities made the questionnaire more complete. The order is random and has no special intention. Items were graded on a 1-7 scale in which 7 was for an activity of very high usefulness, 6 high, 5 medium high, 4 medium, 3 medium low, 2 low and 1 very low. You can see a sample of the questionnaire in the Appendix.

The second questionnaire is student-focused and it follows Horwitz's BALLI method. As it means a great part of my study, I would like to describe Horwitz' method before commenting the differences with my version. His questionnaire consists of 34 enumerated items that are initially listed with no thematic order. Later, when Horwitz analyzed them and presented the results in his study, items adopt a new order and are classified according to determinate thematic categories:

The first category is titled 'The Difficulty of Language Learning' and contains items that are used to give an insight of the difficulty that subjects see on different aspects of the task of learning a language. These items are 'Some languages are easier to learn than others', 'The language I am trying to learn is:', 'I believe

that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well’, ‘If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take him/her to become fluent?’, ‘It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language’ and ‘It is easier to read and write this language than to speak and understand it.’

The second group is named ‘Foreign Language Aptitude’ and it deals with learners beliefs about the ability to learn a language that specific groups may possess. It contains nine items that focus their attention on different groups of people: ‘It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language’, ‘Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language’, ‘It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one’, ‘I have foreign language aptitude’, ‘Women are better than men at learning foreign languages’, ‘People who are good at maths and science are not good at learning foreign languages’, ‘People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent’, ‘Americans are good at learning foreign languages’ and ‘Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language’. The answers to these questions, along with the information about students’ grades, are expected to reveal some correlations that will show the impact of self-evaluations on the final proficiency of learners.

The third group of items is called ‘The Nature of Language Learning’ and deals with the different choices that students make when it comes to choose the suitable way of learning and the necessities that it implies. Items are: ‘It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language’, ‘It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country’, ‘Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words’, ‘Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules’, ‘Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects’ and ‘Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English.’ As we can see, some focus their attention on the significance of cultural knowledge, while others ask about the concrete task on which the process of learning a language must be based. Also, a different belief serves to value the differences between languages and other school subjects.

The fourth group of items is ‘Learning and Communication Strategies’ and deals again with different beliefs about how students must handle the process of learning a language. Items ‘It is important to repeat and practice a lot’, and ‘It is important to practice in the language laboratory’ raise opinions that do not focus on any specific activity. These others evaluate specific aspects of the task of communication: ‘It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent’, ‘You should not say anything in the foreign language

until you can say it correctly’, which contrasts with the following ‘It is o.k. to guess if you don’t know a word in the foreign language’, ‘If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language’, ‘I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people’ and ‘If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on’.

This fourth group is made up of certain items that can result in either corroborated or contradictory conclusions depending on the answers. In this way, it would be surprising to find resembling assessments by the same subject on items that do not defend the same idea. For instance, a positive response to the item ‘I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people’ would be noteworthy if the same subject strongly agrees with the item ‘If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language’. There are also items from other groups that can help to detect this kind of conflicting beliefs. For instance, some items in the second group give an insight about how difficult it is for certain groups to be successful in the process of learning a language. On the other hand, some in the first group describe the difficulty of some activities in English or the language in general. Hence, it would be remarkable to find a subject who strongly agrees with the item ‘Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language’ and then says that English is a very difficult language. Such a case would be a good example of a high motivated subject.

Finally, group 5 ‘Motivations and Expectations’ is mainly interested in what students expect to gain from learning a language, and thus motivates them. We have four items here: ‘If I get to speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it’, ‘If I learn to speak this language very well, it will help me get a good job’, ‘Americans think that it is important to speak a foreign language’ and ‘I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.’ The answers to these items may also help us to see how much learners’ aptitude depends on the motivational aspect and how many subjects are capable of making an effort and obtaining good results in English although thinking that they will not have many opportunities to use it in the future.

My study follows the same thematic order as Horwitz’s discussion and provides the subjects with the title of each category of items in order for them to be oriented and to know what they are being asked about. In the same way, most items except two that are options-questions are answered through a 1-5 scale.

However, in mine 5-rating means ‘strongly agree’, 4 ‘agree’, 3 ‘neither agree nor disagree’, 2 ‘disagree’ and 1 ‘strongly disagree’, while in Horwitz is in the other way around.

Items are maintained, but some changes were made in order to facilitate the comprehension of the subjects and to adapt the questionnaire to the specific context of Galician/Spanish-English Learning. In this way, for instance, item 4 ‘The language I am trying to learn is:’ turns into ‘English is:’; the meaning of item 18 ‘I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people’ changes in the questionnaire in Spanish to ‘self-confident/tengo confianza en mí mismo’, which means directly the opposite, so answers in English to this item (they were only 2) will be inverted in order to make them fit in with those in Spanish; item 15 ‘I have foreign language aptitude’ changes to ‘I am good at learning languages’ in order to avoid the classic misunderstanding attitude-aptitude; item 26 ‘Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from English’ turns into ‘(...) translating from Spanish/Galician’; and item 21 ‘It is important to practice in the language laboratory’ changes to ‘It is important to practice the language in class’. Also, any reference to ‘Americans’ is changed to ‘Spanish people’.

3.4 Results

Regarding the first questionnaire, these are the results of teachers (Table 3). *X* refers to each response and *y* to the different activities. The column on the very right indicates the mean of each activity. For instance, ‘pronunciation practice’ has a mean of 5.16, meaning that the average of response is very close to 5 (medium high):

TABLE 3. Teachers’ beliefs about ‘useful’ activities for EFL.

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|-------------------------------|------|-------|------|------|---|------|---|------|
| Pronunciation practice | 33 % | 17 % | 17 % | 17 % | - | 17 % | - | 5.16 |
| Explanations to class | 50 % | 17 % | 33 % | - | - | - | - | 6.16 |
| Conversation practice | 50 % | 50 % | - | - | - | - | - | 6.5 |
| Error correction | 17 % | 17 % | 50 % | 17 % | - | - | - | 5.33 |
| Vocabulary development | - | 100 % | - | - | - | - | - | 6 |

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|---|---|------|
| Listening to/ using cassettes | 67 % | 17 % | - | 17 % | - | - | - | 6.33 |
| Self-discovery of errors | 17 % | 83 % | - | - | - | - | - | 6.16 |
| Using pictures/films/ video | - | 50 % | 33 % | 17 % | - | - | - | 5.33 |
| Pair work | - | 67 % | 33 % | - | - | - | - | 5.66 |
| Group work | 17 % | 17 % | 17 % | 33 % | 17 % | - | - | 4.83 |
| Grammar exercises | - | 33 % | 33 % | 33 % | - | - | - | 5 |

Teachers' evaluation of activities is generally quite positive. We only obtained one 2 and one 3-rating, both from the same subject (marked in red), and there is no 1-rating in the whole table. The total average of ratings is 5.67, which means that teachers' ratings average is close to 6 (HIGH USEFULNESS). The subject with the lowest mean is number 3 (4.90) and the subject with the highest mean is number 2 (6.09). The other 4 subjects are in between with averages higher than 5.5.

As we can see, there is not a big disagreement between teachers' ratings. This is clearly seen in the ratings of the activity 'vocabulary development', which all the teachers marked with 6-rating. Still, the fact that they are only 6 subjects makes the possibility of disagreement much lower.

In the case of activities, those which involve listening or speaking practice ('explanations to class', 'conversation practice', 'listening to' and 'pair work') are qualified by teachers as very high or high. The activity that teachers give more importance to is 'conversation practice', with a rating mean of 6.5. All of them rated it with 7 and 6 points. The second activity would be 'listening to' with a 6.33 average, followed by 'explanations to class' with 6.16. These ratings show how important those activities through which learners can improve their speaking/listening abilities are for teachers. On the other hand, those that Mathew Peacock (1998) defines as traditional language activities, such as 'error correction' and 'grammar exercises', have lower ratings in teachers: 5.33 and 5 respectively. Finally, the activity of 'pronunciation practice', which can involve either oral or written practice, was also one of the worst valued with an average of 5.16.

Despite these differences, all the activities except ‘group work’ surpass 5 point ratings and are thus qualified as activities with at least MEDIUM HIGH usefulness. In fact, some activities that are not the most communicative ones even reach the level of HIGH usefulness: vocabulary development (6) and self-discovery of errors (6.16), making the overall average (5.67) of teachers more close to HIGH than to MEDIUM HIGH.

Now, these are the results of the learners (table 4). Again, *x* indicates the response and *y* the activity. Data show the percentage of subjects that chose each response. In the first row, for instance, ‘pronunciation practice’ has a rating average of 4.28, which means that the mean is very close to 4 (medium):

TABLE 4. Learners’ beliefs about ‘useful’ activities for EFL.

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|
| Pronunciation practice | 20 % | 18 % | 10 % | 12 % | 12 % | 18 % | 10 % | 4.28 |
| Explanations to class | 23 % | 43 % | 18 % | 10 % | 5 % | - | - | 5.7 |
| Conversation practice | 27 % | 27 % | 8 % | 17 % | 8 % | 10 % | 3 % | 5.03 |
| Error correction | 32 % | 33 % | 20 % | 10 % | - | 5 % | 2 % | 5.73 |
| Vocabulary development | 25 % | 50 % | 18 % | 5 % | 2 % | - | - | 5.92 |
| Listening to/ using cassettes | 18 % | 30 % | 32 % | 18 % | 2 % | - | - | 5.45 |
| Self-discovery of errors | 20 % | 42 % | 17 % | 15 % | 3 % | 3 % | - | 5.5 |
| Using pictures/films/ video | 15 % | 13 % | 20 % | 17 % | 13 % | 17 % | 5 % | 4.3 |
| Pair work | 22 % | 22 % | 15 % | 13 % | 3 % | 18 % | 7 % | 4.63 |
| Group work | 13 % | 22 % | 15 % | 15 % | 5 % | 15 % | 15 % | 4.18 |
| Grammar exercises | 32 % | 32 % | 12 % | 13 % | 7 % | 5 % | - | 5.53 |

Learners’ evaluation of activities does not yield any totally homogeneous answer, since the number of students is 10 times the number of teachers. Still, a great amount of learners qualified ‘vocabulary development’ as an activity of high or very high usefulness in class; 75% of students did that. This fact turns this activity into the one with the highest rating average, reaching 5.92 points, which shows the agreement

among these learners with the high importance of vocabulary in order to be successful in languages. Nobody gave neither 2 nor 1-rating to this activity.

Group work is the counter-part in learners. 35% of students think that the usefulness of this activity in language learning is medium low, low or very low, and 50% of them think it is medium high, high or very high. In this way, it is seen that it is this high degree of variation what makes 'group work' the worst valued activity with a rating average of 4.18 points.

This variation of ratings occurs in all the activities with a mean below 5 points, the lowest-rating activities: 'pronunciation practice', 'using pictures/films/video', 'pair work' and 'group work'. In these cases answers are more varied and their percentages are thus more balanced. This means that what makes an activity decrease its rating average is the balance between 1, 2 and 3- ratings and 5, 6 and 7- ratings.

Considering that 'group work' is the one with the lowest rating average (4.18), and that 7 activities out of 11 surpass the MEDIUM HIGH rating, it is clear that generally speaking students show a certain degree of positiveness towards their activities program.

Two of these lowest-rating activities are oral. One is pronunciation practice, that can actually be practiced both through oral and written practice; and the other is pair work, that is in eighth position. Also 'conversation practice', which is the most useful activity to practice speaking, hardly reaches the 5-rating average and goes in seventh position. The other two are 'group work' and 'using pictures/films/video', with 4.18 and 4.3 ratings respectively.

On the other hand, three of the activities with the highest ratings, along with 'vocabulary development' at the very top, are more traditional language activities that do not imply a communicative interaction: 'grammar exercises', 'error correction' and 'self-discovery of errors'. 76% of students qualified the first as an activity of very high, high or medium high usefulness; the percentage of the second rises to 85%; and only 6% of teachers said that 'self-discovery of errors' is an activity of medium low or low usefulness and no one rated it with 1 point.

Still, the exception in learners is the high ratings given to two oral receptive activities such as ‘listening to’ and ‘explanations to class’. None of the students considered the former as an activity of low or very low usefulness and 43.3% of students qualified the latter as an activity of high usefulness.

Regarding BALLI questionnaire that is intended to report on the influence of beliefs on the proficiency and successfulness of students, these are the results. As you can see, we will separate them according to the thematic categories that Horwitz establishes. *X* indicates the response and *y* the belief. The column on the very right indicates the mean of each activity. In the first case, belief 3 has a rating average of 4, which means that the mean of response surpasses 4 (AGREE).

TABLE 5. Beliefs about the difficulty of language learning.

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| BELIEF 3 | 45% | 55% | - | - | - | 4.45 |
| BELIEF 4 | 2 % | 25 % | 32 % | 37 % | 5 % | 3.18 |
| BELIEF 6 | 10 % | 33 % | 40 % | 17 % | - | 3.36 |
| BELIEF 14 | 17 % | 48 % | 18 % | 8 % | 8 % | 3.56 |
| BELIEF 24 | 5 % | 27 % | 25 % | 30% | 13 % | 2.8 |
| BELIEF 28 | 22 % | 25 % | 27 % | 22 % | 5 % | 3.36 |

5 = STRONGLY AGREE

4 = AGREE

3 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE

2 = DISAGREE

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

BELIEF 3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.

BELIEF 4. English is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language.

BELIEF 6. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.

BELIEF 14. If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him/her to become fluent? 1) less than a year, 2) 1-2 years, 3) 3-5 years, 4) 5-10 years, 5) you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.

BELIEF 24. It is easier to speak than understand English.

BELIEF 28. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.

In this first group of beliefs, students' opinions are quite varied. Belief 3 is the only exception, since 100% of students agrees or strongly agrees with the idea that some languages are easier than others, as table 5 shows above.

In the case of belief 4 about the level of difficulty of English language, students do not seem to have an extreme opinion on it. They do not see English as a very easy or very difficult language. Yet, their opinion is closer to the latter. 42% think that English is difficult against 27% that think it is easy.

Belief 6 is one of the ideas that can mostly serve to draw conclusions about the motivational aspect. 40% of students do not agree nor disagree with the idea that they will learn to speak English very well one day. Only 17% believe that they will not do it.

On the other hand, a similar percentage of students responded negatively to the next belief 14 about the time needed for the task of learning a language, showing a too exigent opinion on it. 5 out of those 10 students that represent this 17% think that nobody will get to learn a language spending 1 hour a day. Still, 65% of all the learners think that it is possible in less than 5 years.

Supporting the idea that one does not need much time to learn a language and being hopeful with learning it well do not go hand in hand for these students. In this way, those subjects who think that it is impossible to learn a language spending one hour a day do not think that they will not get to learn to speak English. Subjects 25 and 54 are good examples of that. They strongly agree with the idea that one day they will learn to speak English very well, but this is not because they need only one hour a day to become fluent in English in less than a year. In fact, they responded that it is impossible to become fluent spending one hour a day.

Finally, answers to beliefs 24 and 28 are signs of the differences students make first between the comparative easiness of productive and receptive oral skills and second between that of oral/communicative and written skills. Responses to belief 24 indicate that students think that receptive oral skills are easier than productive ones. Then, in belief 28 students see more difficult to speak and understand English than to write and read it. Only 27% of students disagree with the idea that to read and write English is easier than to speak and understand it.

TABLE 6. Beliefs about foreign language aptitude.

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| BELIEF 1 | 38 % | 37 % | 20 % | 5 % | - | 4.08 |
| BELIEF 2 | 18 % | 37 % | 30 % | 13 % | 2 % | 3.72 |
| BELIEF 10 | 12 % | 40 % | 27%6 | 13 % | 8 % | 3.33 |
| BELIEF 15 | 7 % | 22 % | 35 % | 27 % | 10 % | 2.88 |
| BELIEF 22 | - | 3 % | 35 % | 25 % | 37 % | 2.05 |
| BELIEF 29 | 3 % | 2 % | 18 % | 22 % | 55 % | 1.77 |
| BELIEF 32 | - | 18 % | 43 % | 23 % | 15 % | 2.65 |
| BELIEF 33 | - | 8 % | 65 % | 18 % | 8 % | 2.73 |
| BELIEF 34 | 42 % | 48 % | 8 % | 2 % | - | 4.3 |

BELIEF 1. It is easier for children than adults to learn English.

BELIEF 2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.

BELIEF 10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.

BELIEF 15. I am good at learning languages.

BELIEF 22. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.

BELIEF 29. People who are good at maths and science are not good at learning foreign languages.

BELIEF 32. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.

BELIEF 33. Spanish people are good at learning foreign languages.

BELIEF 34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.

The results of this second section (Table 6) of beliefs answer the question ‘Who is better at learning languages?’ and most of them are related to the motivational aspect. We see again how cognition and conation are intrinsically related. It was expected to find more varied answers among learners that would not lead to convincing conclusions, since aptitude depends more on the individual than the social groups included in these beliefs. Hence, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ was expected to have a high percentage of responses in most of these questions. As we can see on table 4, the best example of this is belief 33, on which 65% of students do not dare to say if Spanish people are good or not at learning foreign languages. However, there are other beliefs that learners are clear about.

Belief 1 shows that students are conscious of the accepted idea that the older you are, the more difficult it is to learn a language. 75% of students agree or strongly agree with the belief that it is easier for children than adults to learn English. Only three students do not agree.

In the case of belief 2, about special gifts for languages, just nine students do not think that some people are born with a special ability, which means that students generally believe in certain innate capacities for languages. This seems to indicate that students think that not everyone is capable of learning a language. However, just one student disagrees with belief 34 that 'everyone can learn to speak a foreign language'. This unlinked results show that these two beliefs do not necessarily work together and that the fact that some people have an innate capacity for languages does not mean for these students that not everyone can learn them. In fact, the only student that thinks that not everyone can learn a foreign language (subject 43), does not believe in special abilities, when it would be apparently more logical that if you do not think that everyone is able to do something is because you think that some people do have a special gift for that.

On the other hand, 51.6% of students in belief 10 think that having learnt a foreign language helps to learn another one more easily, while 21.6% of them disagree with this idea. Moreover, knowing several languages is not for these students about intelligence, since only 11 (18%) agree with belief 32 'People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent'. Only 1 out of these 11 students do not believe in the innate capacities of belief 2, which helps to confirm the absence of conflicting beliefs here, since those who are in favor of intelligence for languages are the same that talk about innate special capacities reinforcing the value of inborn knowledge.

Belief 15 'I am good at learning languages' is the item that gives the clearest signs of self-confidence. Responses were very different among participants. Even so, it is relevant that only 17 students (28%) see themselves as either good or very good at learning languages. Only 2 out of these 17 have not passed the last semester of English. The other 15 have obtained at least a grade of 6. On the other hand, 22 students answered that they were not good at languages. 15 of them have not passed the last English semester.

Moreover, beliefs 22 and 29 of the questionnaire were not supported. Only two subjects think women are better than men at languages, both boys, and three think that people who are good at science and maths are not good at languages. 77% of students do not agree with the latter. This is supported by the overwhelming agreement on the last belief number 34, since 90% of students think everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.

Finally, Spanish nationality in belief 33 and its frequent association with a bad level of English does not seem initially a very determining factor for the aptitude of learners according to these students, since 65% of them do not agree nor disagree with the idea that Spanish people are good at languages. Yet, only 5 students (8%) agree with that.

TABLE 7. Beliefs about the nature of language learning.

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| BELIEF 8 | 7 % | 13 % | 45 % | 27 % | 8 % | 2.83 |
| BELIEF 11 | 30 % | 43 % | 22 % | 5 % | - | 3.98 |
| BELIEF 16 | 13 % | 53 % | 28 % | 5 % | - | 3.75 |
| BELIEF 20 | 12 % | 37 % | 37 % | 15 % | - | 3.45 |
| BELIEF 25 | 15 % | 47 % | 30 % | 7 % | 2 % | 3.67 |
| BELIEF 26 | 3 % | 13 % | 33 % | 40 % | 10 % | 2.6 |

BELIEF 8. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.

BELIEF 11. It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.

BELIEF 16. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.

BELIEF 20. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammatical rules.

BELIEF 25. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.

BELIEF 26. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from Spanish/Galician.

This third section is made up of beliefs concerned with what language learning consists of and some of its necessities. Results in table 7 show a very clear agreement among participants in some of them.

The first belief 8 is the one in which responses are more varied. 45% of the students are not certain that knowing the culture of the country is necessary in the process of learning the language. Only 20% agree or strongly agree with this statement. In contrast, there is a big agreement (73%) with belief 11 that learning the foreign language in the country of origin is crucial and better than doing it in your country. Only three students do not agree with it.

There are other three beliefs in this section related to the question of what learning a language is mostly about: vocabulary, grammar or translation. Here we find some of the most significant results of the

study. In the case of learning new vocabulary words, students have the biggest level of agreement. Only three do not agree with the idea that learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words. Regarding grammar rules things are not so different. Only nine students disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that language learning is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new grammar rules.

On the other hand, translation does not seem for learners a decisive task in the process of learning. 50% disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that learning a language is mostly a matter of translating from Spanish or Galician. Taking into account that translating practice can be oriented to oral practice and is an activity that usually makes students exert themselves, this result gives again insight into the absence of communicative activities on learners' priorities.

Finally, belief 25 deals with learners' awareness of the fact that learning a language is different from learning other subjects. Only five students do not believe in this affirmation. Establishing a comparative of this belief with belief 14 in table 3 about the time required to learn a language, it is found that 4 out of these 5 students are surprisingly quite exigent with the quantity of time that is necessary to achieve fluency in English. In fact two of them are part of those few that think that it is impossible to become fluent spending one hour a day. Hence, those who do not see languages different from other school subjects are conscious of the extra effort needed for languages.

TABLE 8. Beliefs about learning and communication strategies

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>LEARNING STRATEGIES</i> | | | | | | |
| BELIEF 17 | 53% | 40% | 3 % | 2 % | 2 % | 4.42 |
| BELIEF 21 | 65% | 33 % | - | 2 % | - | 4.62 |
| <i>COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES</i> | | | | | | |
| BELIEF 7 | 7 % | 12 % | 45 % | 25 % | 12 % | 2.77 |
| BELIEF 9 | 2 % | 7 % | 17 % | 47 % | 28 % | 2.07 |
| BELIEF 12 | 23 % | 40 % | 25 % | 8 % | 3 % | 3.72 |

| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | MEAN |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| BELIEF 13 | - | 12 % | 37 % | 25 % | 27 % | 2.33 |
| BELIEF 18 | 15 % | 22 % | 28 % | 22 % | 13 % | 3.03 |
| BELIEF 19 | 20 % | 33 % | 22 % | 15 % | 10 % | 3.38 |

LEARNING STRATEGIES

BELIEF 17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.

BELIEF 21. It is important to practice the language in class.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

BELIEF 7. It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.

BELIEF 9. You shouldn't say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly.

BELIEF 12. If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.

BELIEF 13. It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language.

BELIEF 18. I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.

BELIEF 19. If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.

The section above deals with communication strategies and it is a good point to see if that learners' inclination to more traditional activities actually affects the opinions on these communication beliefs. The first two ones in table 8 are about communicative learning strategies and the others refer to different ways of acting once you are involved in a conversation.

Regarding learning strategies, there is an overwhelming agreement among students with beliefs 17 and 21 that it is important to repeat and practice a lot and also to practice the language in class. 93% agree with the former and 98% with the latter.

Communication strategies' beliefs relate to each other and are useful to detect conflicting beliefs in this section. Firstly, beliefs 7 and 9 have to do with the level of importance of good pronunciation according to learners. 75% of the students do not agree with the idea that one cannot say anything in the foreign language until being able to say it correctly, whereas only 8% agree with it. In the same way, only 18% think that it is important to speak a foreign language with a perfect accent.

Beliefs 12 and 18 deal with the level of self-confidence that students feel when they have to speak the foreign language. Positive and negative answers to belief 18 are almost perfectly symmetrical, so there are some students who feel self-conscious when speaking a foreign language and some others that not. Still,

only 12% of the participants said in belief 12 that they would not go up to speak with someone they hear speaking the foreign language. Moreover, there is no coincidence between those who are doubtful and those who would not take the chance. Most of the students that are self-conscious say that they would make an attempt.

Finally, answers to beliefs 13 and 19 describe to what extent it is important to be semantically and grammatically correct when one starts to speak a foreign language. Only 12% of them think that it is o.k. to guess if you do not know a word in the foreign language; and only 25% do not agree with the idea that it will be hard to get rid of mistakes if you are allowed to make them at the beginning. Both opinions are intensively related. The same who think it is o.k. to guess believe that it will not be difficult to get rid of previous mistakes.

TABLE 9. Beliefs about motivation and expectations

| | A | B | C | D | E | MEAN |
|------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|
| BELIEF 23 | 57 % | 32 % | 10 % | - | 2 % | 4.42 |
| BELIEF 27 | 38 % | 32 % | 30 % | - | - | 4.08 |
| BELIEF 30 | 17% | 35 % | 38 % | 5 % | 5 % | 3.53 |
| BELIEF 31 | 18 % | 42 % | 33 % | 3 % | 3 % | 3.68 |

BELIEF 23. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.

BELIEF 27. If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.

BELIEF 30. Spanish people think it is important to speak a foreign language.

BELIEF 31. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.

The last table 9 above focuses on the aspect of motivation and gives insight into how this affects students' successfulness in the foreign language. There was an impressive agreement among participants with every single belief.

Regarding belief 23 about the opportunities to use the language in the future and belief 27 about those to get a good job thanks to language knowledge, students are overwhelmingly convinced. Only one subject thinks he will not have many opportunities to use English in the future; he has not passed last

semester. Moreover, only 6 are reticent towards this belief, so 88% agree or strongly agree with it. In relation to job opportunities, no one responded negatively to the idea that knowing a foreign language gives access to a better one.

On the other hand, despite the cliché that Spanish people do not have a good level of English, these learners mostly think it is important for Spanish people to learn a foreign language. Still, 38% do not agree nor disagree with this statement and six students disagree or strongly disagree. None of these six agree with belief 33 that Spanish people are good at learning foreign languages.

The last belief 31 does have similar results to the latter. There is a high percentage of students who are uncertain that knowing foreign speakers better encourages them to learn the language; and only 4 are not motivated by this idea.

4. Discussion, conclusions and suggestions for further research

Before commenting the most important findings regarding the results of my study, I would like to summarize the main ideas seen in the literature review with regard to the two questions on which this study is based: 1) is there agreement between teachers and learners regarding preferences of activities in language learning?, 2) to what extent do aptitude, motivation and strategies beliefs have impact on the successfulness of learners in language learning?

With regard to the initial theoretical overview of the the concepts of aptitude, motivation and affect, it was first emphasized a very close and integrated relationship between the three terms as Lourdes Ortega comments in *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* (2013). This integration guided the present study to analyze the three concepts together, concluding that the beliefs about one of them can both cause and be caused by the beliefs about the two others.

In the same way, this fact made my combinatory study more compact. The beliefs about the usefulness of activities in the first questionnaire were increasingly related to those about the selection of strategies in learners in the second one and, in turn, to the remaining ones regarding aptitude and motivation.

Secondly, the reading of some studies that were described after the theoretical introduction let draw some conclusions that are matter of study in my investigation:

In the case of learners' and teachers' opinion on the usefulness of activities in EFL context, Mathew Peacock (1998) found a very visible discrepancy between both groups. He distinguished learners' preference of more traditional activities such as grammar practice from teachers' emphasis on more communicative ones.

Concerning the why of this disagreement and focusing specially on learners' beliefs, there were many different contributions in literature. First, Horwitz (1985) and Kern (1995) highlighted the influence of the way of studying supported by teachers and the academic system in the preference of activities by learners. This was corroborated 20 years later by the study of Lin Pan and David Block (2011) in China, in which students reported that their exams were merely based on grammar exercises, something that affected their beliefs. Then, Christison and Krahnke (1986) talked about affective implications on the use of communicative activities in learners, who could for instance feel embarrassed when they had to speak in front of people. On the other hand, Willing (1988) oppositely believed in a direct relationship between the presence of difficulty on a language task and learners' motivation to improve this task. Finally, Sara Cotterall (1995) supported the idea that an awareness of the effort that language learning implies makes a positive effect on learners' readiness to learn them by themselves.

After all the studies that talked about these factors were published, Peacock (1998) confirmed by means of personal interviews to respondents that the lack of understanding between learners beliefs and those in teachers certainly has an effect on students' motivation and commitment towards language learning. This fact encouraged me to use Horwitz' BALLI method and his study in 1988; and thus to explore the effects that determining beliefs cause in learners' motivation and selection of activities and, in some cases, even in their level of successfulness in languages.

Regarding the results of my study, the first questionnaire served doubtlessly to corroborate Peacock's findings in 1998. Both learners' and students' answers support their results in *Exploring the gap between teachers' and learners' beliefs about 'useful' activities for EFL*. Although the present study deals with a number of teachers that is not similar to the number of learners, some distinctions between them are clear.

On the one hand, teachers are more fond of activities in which the productive and receptive oral skills of the students can be trained: conversation, listening, work in pairs, etc. They qualified them as activities of high or very high usefulness. On the other hand, learners classified at the very top activities such as ‘vocabulary development’, ‘grammar exercises’, ‘error correction’ and ‘self-discovery of errors’, which are included in the set of traditional language learning (Peacock 1998).

While the activity of ‘conversation practice’, for instance, is the one with the highest value in teachers, it is classified in seventh position in learners. Similarly, ‘pair work’ has a rating of 4.63 points in learners that means more than 1 point lower than teachers’ rating to this activity. In respect to non-communicative activities, we also see a clear disagreement between both groups in some of them. ‘Grammar exercises’ is surprisingly the second less useful activity for teachers, whereas for learners is in fourth position. Something similar occurs with ‘error correction’, which occupies the second position in learners and the eighth position in teachers.

The fact that such a difference between both groups happens in activities that are directly opposed in terms of objectives is crucial to confirm the kind of discrepancy discovered by Mathew Peacock (1998). Yet, there are many activities whose level of usefulness is similarly valued by learners and teachers. Their results do not show a visible disagreement between both groups.

First of all, ‘vocabulary development’ is the most useful activity for learners, and 100% of teachers qualified it as one of high usefulness. Secondly, activities that imply oral practice such as ‘listening to’, ‘explanations to class’ and ‘pronunciation practice’ share to some extent similar ratings in both groups. The first is classified in second position by teachers and in sixth position by learners; the second is equally classified in third position by both groups and the last one goes in ninth position for teachers and in tenth position for learners. Moreover, ‘self-discovery of errors’ is also highly valued by teachers. In fact, they classified it in third position above learners, who did it in fifth position. Finally, both groups agree with the low level of usefulness of ‘group work’ and ‘using pictures/films/video’. The first goes in last position for both groups and the second in ninth position for learners and eighth position for teachers.

Finally, despite some low ratings in responses, especially in learners, it can be concluded that both groups are roughly speaking positive towards the activities they were asked about. There was not a significant amount of learners who marked activities with 1, 2 or 3-ratings and only two cases of these ratings were found in teachers' responses. Still, this insubstantial difference of overall average between teachers and learners changes the level of usefulness given by them to these 11 activities as a whole. The 5.67 points of overall average of teachers decreases to 5.11 points in learners, going from high to medium high usefulness ratings.

On the other hand, responses to the second questionnaire considerably supported most of the ideas introduced in the literature. These are the most important ones:

In the case of table 5 regarding beliefs about the difficulty of the language, the first finding was that the opinion on language in general can definitely influence the motivation of learners. Two of the three subjects that considered English a very difficult language in belief 4 got a 1 and a 2 in the last semester; and the only student who believed that English is a very easy language got a 9. Still, both beliefs and grades can be a result of each other, in the sense that thinking English is easy can motivate students and make them better, but also getting a good mark in English can make students think that English is easy. In a similar way in belief 6, ten students answered that they will not learn to speak English very well. Only two of them got more than a 5 in the last semester. This fact goes in opposite direction to what Willing (1988) said about the increase of motivation in learners that comes from seeing languages as a difficult task.

On the other hand, two conclusions were drawn in respect to the opinion of learners about the time required to learn English well in belief 14. The first was that this opinion does not substantially influence the proficiency of the subjects. The second was its unexpected lack of relationship with belief 6 about students' hope to learn English well one day. A new question was therefore raised: How much time will spend on English those students who expect to learn English well one day but at the same time think that one hour a day is not enough to do so? The two subjects that are in this situation got a 9 in English in the last semester, which indicates that they are good students considering that 39% of them did not pass. This shows that good students are conscious of the time needed for languages, and supports Sara Cotterall's idea (1995:199) that learners who are aware of the particularities of languages tasks tend to be more autonomous and seem to be prepared to face the challenge and later obtain better results.

Finally, it was seen that opinions on the easiness of oral and written activities in belief 28 have a particular relationship with the ones on the usefulness of the same in the first questionnaire. Although students think that communicative activities are more difficult, they still see more useful those on which they do not have to make a big effort and are easier for them.

Regarding Table 6, learners' opinion on the aptitude of certain groups shows in some cases a close relationship with the varied successfulness in those learners. First of all, two of the only three students that did not agree with the idea that it is easier for children than adults to learn English got an 8 and a 9 in the last semester. Secondly, there is a high interference in academic proficiency of self-perspective towards languages in belief 15. 88% of students that think that they have an aptitude for languages have obtained at least a grade of 6 in English in the last semester. In the same way, 68% of students who think they are not good at languages have not passed the semester. Hence, these beliefs are a proof that cognition and conation dimensions are considerably related, as Lourdes Ortega (2013) asserted, and that opinion on our own aptitude for something regulates our motivation to deal with it and our posterior successfulness on it.

The other finding in this group of beliefs is that students are quite inclusive with the capability of learning languages. Neither gender nor studying sciences or humanities are crucial points for them to be good at languages and almost everyone agrees with the idea that everyone can learn them.

In table 7, it was found that responses to beliefs about what learning a language consists of clearly agree both with the conclusions drawn in the first questionnaire and with Peacock's (1998) findings about the kind of activities that teachers and learners prefer. Grammar and vocabulary have also here very high ratings, while translation practice is not so important for learners. Also, considering that learning a language is mostly about one only activity, specially traditional ones in the case of learners, can lead them to be less successful in the process of learning. This was shown by the fact that 78% of the only 9 students that did not see language as a matter of learning a lot of grammatical rules have passed the last semester.

Also, it was seen that negative answers to belief 25 about the presence of differences between learning languages and other school subjects are not related to those answers to belief 14 from learners that think that is not necessary much time to learn a language. This fact shows that these students do not see the

necessity of time as a differential factor between languages and other school subjects, since although they are aware of the extra time needed for languages, they do not see them as different from other school subjects.

Regarding table 8 about opinions on the practice of communicative activities, most of the results must be compared with the responses of the first questionnaire. First, an overwhelming overgeneralization that practicing speaking in class and repeating a lot are exceedingly important was found in learners. This result does not coincide with the ratings of usefulness given to the activity of 'conversation practice', for instance. Thus, it can be concluded that learners are conscious of their necessities of using the language orally in class, but affective factors such as the embarrassment to talk in front of their classmates may make them unclear about the selection of activities, as Christison and Krahnke affirmed in 1986.

On the other hand, the results of beliefs 7 and 9 about the importance of a good pronunciation when learning English explain the low rating average that 'pronunciation practice' activity received in the first questionnaire by learners. Also, it was found in beliefs 12 and 18, about the level of self-confidence to speak, that the fact of being unsure to speak the foreign language does not prevent learners from taking advantage of the opportunity to do it. Finally, answers to beliefs 13 and 19 about grammatical and semantic obligations in language confirmed the level of usefulness given by students to the activities of 'vocabulary development' and 'grammar exercises' in the first questionnaire.

Finally, direct motivational beliefs in table 9 do not show a relationship with the successfulness of the participants in English. Almost all the students agree with the opportunities that learning English gives to them, so their marks are of all kinds. Still, it was seen that the importance given to languages is related to the posterior success in it, since the only six students that answered that it is not important for Spanish people to learn a foreign language do not agree or strongly disagree with belief 33 that Spanish people are good at learning foreign languages.

In conclusion, the present study served to corroborate to some extent my hypothesis based on the ideas introduced at the beginning. The first questionnaire showed an important disagreement between learners and teachers with the level of usefulness of activities that are categorically very different. Then, answers to the second one demonstrated that students' beliefs both about the aptitude in learners and the difficulty of activities can change their motivation toward languages and, in turn, their successfulness in the

process of learning. Regarding the selection of activities, it was seen that having a restricted view of the necessities of language learning can make it worse.

Considering that this was a very small-scale study, a higher quantity of participants in a further research would help to draw more consistent conclusions. Also, by means of a new adaptation of BALLI method, dropping some unnecessary beliefs and including other beliefs such as ‘I am very satisfied with my English teacher/teaching’, the relationship between these beliefs and proficiency in English could be better studied. Finally, specific interviews to both learners and teachers following the methodology of Mathew Peacock (1998) would help to clarify the restrictive information that is obtained through a questionnaire on which participants cannot express more than the given answers they choose.

In this way, the degree of interference of these beliefs in the process of learning would be better understood and solutions to the problem could be investigated. "How can the differences between teachers and learners be eliminated?" and "How can learners' motivation be increased?" are some of the questions for further research.

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Appendix

CUESTIONARIO DEL PROFESOR

/ / 2019

SEXO:

FECHA DE NACIMIENTO: / /

- Este cuestionario es anónimo. No debes poner tu nombre en ninguna de las hojas.
 - El propósito de este cuestionario es investigar la opinión del profesorado con respecto a la utilidad que tienen ciertas actividades en clase.
 - MIL GRACIAS de antemano por vuestra colaboración
-

1. Evalúa las siguientes actividades en negrita marcando a su derecha la opción que creas que se corresponde con su nivel de utilidad en clase.

7) muy alto 6) alto 5) medio alto 4) medio 3) medio bajo 2) bajo 1) muy bajo

practicar pronunciación

explicaciones a la clase

practicar conversación

corregir errores

aprender vocabulario

listening

corregir errores propios

usar imágenes, videos o películas

trabajo en parejas

trabajo en grupos

ejercicios de gramática

TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

/ / 2019

GENDER:

DATE OF BIRTH: / /

- This questionnaire is anonymous. Do not write your name on any of the sheets.
 - The aim of this questionnaire is to investigate teachers' opinions about the usefulness of some activities in class.
 - Thanks in advance for your help.
-

1. Evaluate the following activities in bold writing the option that corresponds in your opinion with its level of usefulness in class.

7) very high 6) high 5) medium high 4) medium 3) medium low 2) low 1) very low

pronunciation practice

explanations to class

conversation practice

error correction

vocabulary development

listening to/using cassettes

self-discovery of errors

using pictures/films/video

pair work

group work

grammar exercises

CUESTIONARIO DEL ALUMNO

/ / 2019

SEXO:

FECHA DE NACIMIENTO: / /

ÚLTIMA NOTA EN INGLÉS:

- Este cuestionario es anónimo. No debes poner tu nombre en ninguna de las hojas.
- El propósito de este cuestionario es investigar: 1) la opinión del alumnado con respecto a la utilidad que tienen ciertas actividades en clase; 2) la opinión del alumnado frente a distintos aspectos que engloban el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, en nuestro caso el inglés.
- Por favor, el cuestionario se debe cubrir en solitario para evitar que las respuestas puedan estar influenciadas por las opiniones de otros participantes, algo que impediría obtener resultados útiles.
- MIL GRACIAS de antemano por vuestra colaboración

1. Evalúa las siguientes actividades en negrita marcando a su derecha la opción que creas que se corresponde con su nivel de utilidad en clase.

7) muy alto 6) alto 5) medio alto 4) medio 3) medio bajo 2) bajo 1) muy bajo

practicar pronunciación
explicaciones a la clase
practicar conversación
corregir errores
aprender vocabulario
listening
corregir errores propios
usar imágenes, videos o películas
trabajo en parejas
trabajo en grupos
ejercicios de gramática

2. Indica tu grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con los enunciados en negrita eligiendo una de las siguientes opciones como respuesta.

5) estoy muy de acuerdo 4) estoy de acuerdo 3) ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
2) no estoy de acuerdo 1) no estoy para nada de acuerdo

*Las preguntas con respuestas incluidas del 1 al 5 no requieren este tipo de respuesta; sólo rodear una de las ya dadas.

DIFICULTAD DE LA LENGUA

- Algunas lenguas son más difíciles de aprender que otras.
- El inglés es:
 - 1) muy difícil
 - 2) difícil
 - 3) de dificultad media
 - 4) fácil
 - 5) muy fácil.
- Creo que aprenderé a hablar inglés muy bien.

- Si alguien le dedica una hora al día al inglés, ¿cuánto tiempo le llevaría hablar con fluidez?
 - 1) menos de 1 año
 - 2) 1-2 años
 - 3) 3-5 años
 - 4) 5-10 años
 - 5) no se puede aprender una lengua dedicándole 1 hora al día
- Es más fácil hablar que entender el inglés.
- Es más fácil leer y escribir en inglés que hablarlo y entenderlo.

APTITUD ANTE LA LENGUA

- A los niños les es más fácil aprender inglés que a los adultos.
- Hay gente que nace con una habilidad especial para aprender una lengua extranjera.
- Para la gente que ya habla una lengua extranjera es más fácil aprender otra.
- Se me dan bien los idiomas.
- Las mujeres son mejores que los hombres para aprender una lengua extranjera.
- La gente que es buena en matemáticas y ciencias no es buena en los idiomas.
- La gente que habla bien más de una lengua es muy inteligente.
- Los españoles somos buenos aprendiendo idiomas.
- Todo el mundo puede aprender una lengua extranjera.

PROCESO DE APRENDIZAJE

- Para aprender una lengua extranjera es necesario conocer también su cultura.
- Es mejor aprender la lengua extranjera en su propio país.
- Aprender una lengua extranjera es en mayor parte una cuestión de aprender mucho vocabulario nuevo.
- Aprender una lengua extranjera es en mayor parte una cuestión de aprender muchas reglas gramaticales.
- Aprender una lengua extranjera es diferente que aprender otras asignaturas.
- Aprender una lengua extranjera es en mayor parte una cuestión de traducir del castellano/gallego.

ESTRATEGIAS DE APRENDIZAJE

- Es importante repetir y practicar mucho.
- Es importante practicar la lengua en clase.

- Es importante hablar una lengua extranjera con un acento excelente.
- No se debe decir nada en la otra lengua hasta que se sepa decir correctamente.
- Si escucho a alguien hablar la lengua que estoy aprendiendo, me dirijo a él/ella para aprovechar y practicar.
- Está bien inventarse una palabra si no se sabe decir en la lengua que estamos aprendiendo.
- Tengo confianza en mí mismo para hablar en otra lengua delante de otra gente.
- Si se te permite cometer errores al principio serán más difíciles de corregir en el futuro.

MOTIVACIÓN Y EXPECTATIVAS

- Si consigo hablar muy bien el inglés tendré muchas oportunidades para usarlo.
- Si consigo hablar muy bien el inglés me ayudará a encontrar un buen trabajo.
- Los españoles pensamos que es importante hablar una lengua extranjera.
- Me gustaría aprender el inglés para poder conocer mejor a sus hablantes.

STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

/ / 2019

GENDER:

DATE OF BIRTH: / /

LAST GRADE IN ENGLISH:

- This questionnaire is anonymous. Do not write your name on any of the sheets.
- The aim of this questionnaire is to investigate: 1) students' opinions about the usefulness of some activities in class; 2) students' opinions about different aspects that involve the process of learning a foreign language, in our case English.
- Please, the questionnaire must be covered when you are alone in order to avoid the answers to be influenced by those of other participants, something that would prevent to draw useful conclusions.
- Thanks in advance for your help.

1. Evaluate the following activities in bold writing the option that corresponds in your opinion with its level of usefulness in class.

7) very high 6) high 5) medium high 4) medium 3) medium low 2) low 1) very low

pronunciation practice
explanations to class
conversation practice
error correction
vocabulary development
listening to/using cassettes
self-discovery of errors
using pictures/films/video
pair work
group work
grammar exercises

2. Indicate your grade of agreement with the following statements in bold by choosing one of the next options as your best answer.

5) strongly agree 4) agree 3) neither agree nor disagree
2) disagree 1) strongly disagree

*Questions that include 1 to 5 options-answers do not require this kind of answer; just circle one of the already given.

THE DIFFICULTY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

- Some languages are easier to learn than others.
- English is:
 - 1) a very difficult language
 - 2) a difficult language
 - 3) a language of medium difficulty
 - 4) an easy language
 - 5) a very easy language
- I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.

- If someone spent one hour a day learning English, how long would it take him/her to become fluent?
 - 1) less than a year
 - 2) 1-2 years
 - 3) 3-5 years
 - 4) 5-10 years
 - 5) you can't learn a language in 1 hour a day
- It is easier to speak than understand English.
- It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE APTITUDE

- It is easier for children than adults to learn English.
- Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.
- It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
- I am good at learning languages.
- Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.
- People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.
- People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.
- Spanish people are good at learning foreign languages.
- Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

- It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to speak the foreign language.
- It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.
- Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words.
- Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammatical rules.
- Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.
- Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translating from Spanish/Galician.

LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
- It is important to practice the language in class.

- It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.
- You shouldn't say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly.
- If I heard someone speaking the language I am trying to learn, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.
- It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language.
- I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.
- If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on.

MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

- If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.
- If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job.
- Spanish people think that it is important to speak a foreign language.
- I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.