MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY ON ENGINEERING STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

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Abstract. *This paper aims to outline the interest of engineering undergraduate students to take an active part in the foreign language class and identify the elements that motivate them to invest effort in order to achieve the goal of becoming efficient communicators in English, able to manage successfully in their future careers as engineers. In order to understand the factors that influence the motivation of students in the group referred to above, we have started from the evaluation of theories on motivation in general and ideas related to reasons that stimulate students to learn technical English and, based on the information presented in the research in the field, we have devised a questionnaire to which a number of 103 students answered. This paper presents results we have obtained, based on students' opinions, and the conclusions thereof.*

Key words: *motivation, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), questionnaire, engineering students*

1. INTRODUCTION - THE CONTEXT OF ESP TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

Especially after 1989, the interest in teaching foreign languages in higher education institutions, with the view of forming specialists that are able to interact globally, has become more and more prominent in Romania. Most universities initiated departments comprised of teachers of English intending to specialize in the field of English for Specific Purposes (Abrudan&Sturza 2014), or English for Academic and Occupational Purposes (Carter, 1983). The project was supported by the Ministry of Education, the Government of Romania, and by other institutions promoting the idea of forming specialists for all the sectors of Romania's economy, skilled not only in their professional fields, but also able to use English actively for research and communication activities. (Negrea, 2011)

At the University of Oradea, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and Faculty of Civil Engineering, Cadastral Survey and Architecture, the study of English is compulsory for the first and second year students (one or two hours per week). In order to obtain the credits they need for the discipline, the students must pass an exam.

Unfortunately, students do not have the possibility to opt for another foreign language course (for example French, German, Italian, Spanish, or other foreign languages). As a result, the groups are mixed with regard to students' proficiency in English. Based simply on our observation and experience of teaching English for Specific Purposes, for more than 18 years, we can say that only few students (between one to five in a group) encounter

major difficulties in using English, being below the intermediate level. Most of them are at the intermediate, or even the upper-intermediate level, while a few (5-10) demonstrate solid knowledge of English and encounter no difficulty in expressing themselves using this language both verbally and in writing. Nevertheless, the groups are, as mentioned above, unbalanced in terms of the ability to use English. Given this context, the main challenge faced by the foreign language teacher is that of devising materials that would involve all participants, enable and encourage students to use the foreign language and eventually become able not only to obtain the grade they need to pass the exam, but also improve their professional communication skills.

Other problems that negatively influence the English for Specific Purposes learning environment at the University of Oradea, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and Faculty of Civil Engineering, Cadastral Survey and Architecture relate to the large number of students (20-30 students) in groups and lack of classroom facilities (tape recorder/CD player, video, projector, etc.). As regards the last aspect mentioned here, we have tried to make up for such absence of facilities by bringing at least CD players to the class, in order to provide students with the opportunity to practice their listening skills.

On the other hand, the absence of curriculum mandates gives teachers the possibility to adapt their teaching materials to students' level of proficiency in English. Though challenging and time-consuming, the strive to present students with appropriate materials, offering them plenty of opportunities to learn technical words, read 'real-life texts' (texts that are taken from specialized books, magazines, Internet sites, not only the ones written for pedagogical purposes), use, through role play-activities, the language in contexts that might be encountered in the future engineers' professional lives, has proved stimulating for both learners and teachers. Therefore, the courses we teach at the University of Oradea are based on materials that introduce a number of at least 1,500 technical concepts that are essential in fields of engineering (related to computer science, mechanical, electrical and civil engineering) and are based on activities aimed at improving students' abilities to cope with input text, spoken or written (work with drawings and visual information: interpreting images, diagrams, tables, charts, presenting trends and giving approximate figures; discussing and describing technical issues: component shapes, quality issues, dimensions, technical requirements, safety standards and regulations, causes and effects, performance and limitation). Activities also encourage students to produce output, both in verbal or written form. The materials are included in several books we have published so far, or are presented to the students in the form of printed materials.

Another method that we have found stimulating (at least as regards engineering undergraduate students' active involvement in the activities presented at the English class and presence at these courses) relates to evaluation. Though we agree that it may be regarded as a rather controversial motivating technique, the use of rewards, in the form of grades, for the activity at each class, has caused, definitely, a more active and frequent participation of students to all classroom activities. We decided to adopt this form of evaluation (Abrudan & Sturza, 2014) (i.e. students are required to be present to at least 80% of the English classes and receive grades on the activities completed, based on the materials presented at that particular class) after 10 years of experience in working with the engineering undergraduate students and applying the 'classical', end-of-semester form of evaluation (at the end of the semester, students have to pass a test, based on the information presented at class during the semester), which, in our opinion, led to poorer results in terms of involvement in classroom activities and consequently improvement of proficiency in

English. Often, students' final marks were low if they did not attend all classes or did not put enough effort in trying to learn what has been taught. Very often they used to rely on their previous knowledge of English, but being evaluated based on the materials presented at class during the semester (focusing on technical English), their results were quite poor. In the last 8 years, we have applied the so-called 'progressive-evaluation method', where students receive grades for their activity at class.

Generally, the classes are quite challenging for most of the students, pleasant and rewarding for learners and the teacher alike, though sometimes focusing mainly on technical English is perceived as being tedious.

Being permanently interested in finding better methods to stimulate students' active participation to the ESP class, we decided to ask them, by means of a questionnaire, about the elements that motivate them to learn English. For this purpose, we have evaluated several sources on the topic of motivation in general and on engineering students' motivation to learn English in particular. Based on the findings presented in specialized literature, we have devised a questionnaire to which a number of 103 students responded. Starting from the answers given, we have drawn conclusions, which will be presented at the end of this study.

2. METHODOLOGY: THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

The preoccupation with the concept of motivation in language teaching and learning has a very long history and is beyond the scope of this study. Actually, we have focused on it in a work published in 2008 (Abrudan, 2008). Here, our interest is restricted to factors that motivate engineering undergraduate students, at the University of Oradea, Romania, to learn technical English. Thus, based on the ideas presented in the literature related to motivation in language learning, and some studies conducted so far on the topic of motivation for learning foreign languages among engineering students (Atef&Munir, 2009, Omid&Mokhtari 2014, Gonzales Ardeo 2016, Nakhon&Tantip 2012, Suryanti&Siregar 2016, Mohd&Buda&Abdullah 2017) we have devised a questionnaire that would help students indicate the factors they find crucial in determining them to learn technical English and continue this behavior so as to become efficient communicators on the international stage of their profession. Essentially, we took into consideration the types of motivation identified by researchers at different moments in time (Gardner 1985, Lightbown&Spada 1993, Spolsky 1989, Yang 2015) and found especially useful the distinction made by Gardner (1983) between extrinsic/instrumental motivation (when the purpose of learning ESP is a pragmatic one: passing examinations, getting a good job, continuing education overseas, enjoying the appraisal of teachers/peers/friends, etc.) and intrinsic/integrative motivation (determined mainly by the desire to become familiar with a community using English, their culture and values and is related to interest, curiosity, preference for challenge, independent mastery, independent judgment and internal criteria for success) (Spolsky 1983). Besides the two types of motivation mentioned above, we took into consideration a type of motivation that relates to learners' inner satisfaction or idea of personal development, labeled "developmental motivation" by Cooper and Conrad (1977). We also took into consideration the factors, identified by researchers, influencing motivation in general and foreign language teaching in particular: personality variables

(Rivers 1980, Williams & Burden 1997), attitudes, learning styles, the role of the teacher and the power relationships between languages, the international context (interest in travelling abroad for leisure or work, interest to interact with specialists in the field).

2.1. Questionaire

In structuring our questionnaire, we started from the factor that we consider essential in motivating learners of technical English: **relevance**. Two questions were associated with this factor (looking at both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation), asking students about the way learning technical English might contribute to fulfilling their interests and objectives, and the extent their English class relates, through the materials presented, to the other subjects they study at college and their future careers. To both questions, students had to circle the one that indicated their answer best (1 – no contribution; 2 – little contribution; 3 – moderate contribution; 4 – important contribution; 5 – essential contribution). The questions were formulated in the following way:

Q1. To what extent did the English class contribute to fulfilling your personal interests and objectives?

Q2. To what extent did your English class relate to other subjects you study and/or to your future career.

Secondly, we took into account **learners' personality variables and learning styles**. Students in the groups evaluated have different personalities and methods of solving problems (Ellis 2005). It has been found that some persons learn better by perception, using their eyes, ears, hands to process the input they receive at class and therefore may be perceived as inclined to be visual (use especially their eyes to read words and look attentively to the teaching tools); others are considered auditory (use mostly their hearing and learn better when they are presented with listening materials and talking to other students), tactile (learn by touching) or kinesthetic (learn by doing) (Wen Xu 2011). As regards their personality, they may be reflective (focusing on accuracy and avoidance of mistakes) or impulsive (bold in using language and focusing on fluency) (Wen Xu 2011). Questions 3 and 4 were devised in order to see what types of activities made students feel more motivated to engage actively in solving tasks and learning and what type of response they are ready to give at classroom activities (in writing or verbal):

Q3. Choose from the following activities the ones that you have done during the English class and you have found motivating. Choose the number that best indicates your option.
   a. Debating (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)
   b. Preparing and giving verbal presentations (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)
   c. Discussing written materials (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)
   d. Interpreting graphs, charts, diagrams, images (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)
   e. Answering questions in writing and writing compositions (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

Q4. Which of the following activities made you feel motivated to take part to the English class?

    a. Activities that gave you time to think carefully and were most of the times solved in writing (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    b. Activities encouraging you to get involved in conversations and answer to questions on the spot (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

Third, we focused on the role of the teacher as a motivating factor. Question 5 asked students to indicate what aspects related to the teacher's attitude towards students (behavior, choice of materials, explanation of requirements for solving tasks and obtaining grades, provision of feedback) have stimulated them more to take part actively to classroom activities:

Q5. What teaching aspects have you found motivating and to what extent?

    a. The teacher's voice, facial expression and body language.
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    b. Eye-contact (teacher to student)
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    c. The teacher's encouraging attitude
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    d. The teacher stated clearly the goals of activities you had to do
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    e. The teacher has made assessment criteria clear to the student
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    f. The teacher offered grades for active participation to classroom activates
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

    g. The teacher provided positive feedback and emphasized students' competence
    (1 – not motivating at all; 2 – motivating to a little extent; 3 – quite motivating; 4 – very motivating; 5 – extremely motivating)

The sixth question focused on aspects related to the atmosphere in the English class, the way activities may be solved and the sitting pattern:

Q6. How were you stimulated to learn by:

    a. The climate of the classroom (1 – not stimulating at all; 2 – stimulating to a little extent; 3 – quite stimulating; 4 – very stimulating; 5 – extremely stimulating)

    b. Frequent group-pair work (1 – not stimulating at all; 2 – stimulating to a little extent; 3 – quite stimulating; 4 – very stimulating; 5 – extremely stimulating)

    c. The sitting pattern. (1 – not stimulating at all; 2 – stimulating to a little extent; 3 – quite stimulating; 4 – very stimulating; 5 – extremely stimulating)

Finally, we focused on elements motivating students to take part to the English class. The first two answer options defined instrumental motivation, the third and the fourth ones referred to integrative motivation, the fifth to developmental motivation, while the

sixth option encouraged students to identify other elements that would motivate them to take part to the English class.

Q7. What are your reasons for taking part to the English class?

a. I want to pass the exam by being evaluated progressively, based on my presence and activity at the class (1 – not important; 2 – of little importance; 3 – quite important; 4 – very important; 5 – extremely important)

b. It is a requirement
   (1 – not important; 2 – of little importance; 3 – quite important; 4 – very important; 5 – extremely important)

c. I want to perform well, as an engineer, on the international context (integrative motivation)
   (1 – not important; 2 – of little importance; 3 – quite important; 4 – very important; 5 – extremely important)

d. I want to be able to integrate with the Western culture if I get a job abroad (integrative motivation)
   (1 – not important; 2 – of little importance; 3 – quite important; 4 – very important; 5 – extremely important)

e. For my personal development (developmental motivation)
   (1 – not important; 2 – of little importance; 3 – quite important; 4 – very important; 5 – extremely important)

f. Others (please specify)
   (1 – not important; 2 – of little importance; 3 – quite important; 4 – very important; 5 – extremely important)

2.2. Participants

A number of 103 students participated in this study by answering the questionnaire presented in the previous section of this paper. They are students from the Faculties of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and Civil Engineering, Cadastral Survey and Architecture, registered in the academic year 2016-2017.

One class before the questionnaire was distributed to the students, we presented participants with the concept of motivation and encouraged them to try and define the word in its general acceptance and then, through guiding questions, to discuss those factors that motivate students to learn a foreign language. We also tried to make learners define their attitude towards learning technical English. In the process, we introduced the concepts of instrumental, developmental and integrative motivation and briefly presented them. Students were also informed about our intention to use the information gathered from their answers to the questionnaire in a paper on engineering students' motivation to learn technical English (we explained that some direct quotations from their answers may be reproduced in the paper) and expressed our hope that the results obtained might be used as a starting point for teachers preparing technical English materials for their students, who might adapt their teaching methods and even curricula to students' preferences, focusing on the factors that motivate learners to perform better at foreign language classes.

We insisted on the importance of getting true and honest answers to the questions. For this reason, we gave students plenty of time to think carefully before choosing an answer and also checking the accuracy of the answers given. The questionnaires were anonymous.

2.3. Questionnaire Results

The results presented in the table below are based on the answers given by 103 students learning English as part of their curricula at the University of Oradea, Faculties of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and Civil Engineering, Cadastral Survey and Architecture.

Table 1

Question number	1 (no motivation / interest)	2 (little motivation / interest)	3 (moderate motivation / interest)	4 (very motivated / interested)	5 (extremely motivated/ interested
Q1	1	7	47	31	17
Q2	0	6	21	48	28
Q3					
a.	0	11	35	39	18
b.	3	12	30	36	22
c.	3	5	25	47	23
d	3	14	25	38	23
e.	6	8	23	35	31
Q4					
a.	4	7	18	46	28
b.	2	14	27	28	32
Q5					
a.	2	3	24	36	38
b.	1	10	21	41	30
c.	0	2	14	38	49
d.	0	5	6	29	53
e.	3	6	15	29	50
f.	0	6	17	27	53
g.	1	0	9	38	55
Q6					
a.	5	16	45	30	7
b.	6	12	29	34	22
c.	11	16	39	27	10
Q7					
a.	0	9	17	39	38
b.	6	19	30	36	12
c.	2	8	12	40	41
d.	6	5	16	45	31
e.	0	4	21	40	38

3. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

As indicated above, Question 1 was aimed to collect information on students' inner motivation to learn English in general and asked them about the extent to which learning

this language might help them fulfill their personal interests and objectives. It appears that students have a moderate to high interest to learn English due to some inner drive, an idea also supported by the extended answers students gave at the end of the questionnaire, when they were asked to give other reasons that make them feel motivated to learn English. Of the 30 students mentioning, more or less explicitly, inner reasons for learning English, several have clearly referred to them: *"I find learning English a personally rewarding experience"*, *"I learn English because I want to grow* (i.e. develop)*, and English helps me go to a higher level, compared to what I am now."*, *"I like the feeling when I speak a language that is different from my native one. That's why I want to learn, to become better at expressing what I think."*, *"First I started learning English because there was an intrinsic factor, which was a state of mind. I kept telling myself that I can do it, and slowly, I began to be pretty good"*. Actually, most of the students answering the questions indicated, next to intrinsic elements, extrinsic factors that determined them to start or carry on learning this language: *"Learning English may be the best thing you can do to improve your life, because in this way you have the opportunity to talk with interesting new people, or impress people around you with your abilities. You can make big jumps in your career, leaving others miles behind." "When I began learning English my motivation was and extrinsic one, because I can't stand someone telling me that I can't do something or people talking around me without me being able to take part to the conversation or understand. Now, I do it for my personal development and because I find our English class pretty interesting. We learn engineering terms which are going to be helpful in our future career."* (personal reasons along instrumental ones).

Question 2 focused on students' perception regarding the relation between the engineering English course and the other subjects they study at the university, since, as emphasized previously in this paper, the English class is structured so as to give students opportunity to learn vocabulary related to their field of study and future careers, as well as to prepare them for being able to use English in an academic and/or professional context, by exercising in making presentations, expressing opinions, agreeing/disagreeing, etc. The large majority of students opined that the English class has a very important contribution to facilitating their communication in a profession-related context, as the materials presented are in relation to the other disciplines they study at college (48 respondents), 28 students found it extremely motivating and 21 subjects associated the contribution of the English class to their development as students of engineering and future specialists with a moderate degree of influence.

Question 3 asked students to choose from among 5 types of activities the ones they have done during the English class and found more motivating. They found as very motivating the activities based on reading and then discussing written materials (47 students), probably because in this way they got a context (the written text) that introduced new technical words and presented an idea that could be further discussed. Actually, most of our English classes were structured in this way (i.e. starting from written texts and then discussing words, ideas in exercises of different kinds, including listening materials). For all the other types of activities mentioned (debating, verbal presentations, interpreting graphs, charts, diagrams and images and writing, the answers indicated similar attitudes on the part of students, most of whom found them moderately motivating or very motivating.

Question 4 relates to the previous one, asking students again about the motivating effect of activities based on writing (found very motivating by 46 students and extremely motivating by 28 students) and on speaking (found very motivating by 28 students and extremely motivating

by 32 students). Based on our observation at class, we can say that students who are not at the upper-intermediate or advanced level prefer to have some time to think and prepare their answers before speaking and often prefer to solve tasks in writing.

Question 5 was aimed to elicit answers on the motivating role of the teacher. Generally, all aspects specified by the sub-points included there were considered either very motivating or extremely motivating. Of special importance seemed to be the good, encouraging attitude on the part of the teacher, the clear statement of goals for each activity done at class and explaining assessment criteria, along the ideas of receiving grades for active participation to classroom activities and being given positive feedback.

The answers come to support our experience at class, which gave us the feeling that positive, encouraging attitudes towards students, positive feedback and even rewards in the form of grades for activities done at class prove very motivating to students. The positive attitude, even the good mood can change a group of non-active students into one where participants become involved. Sometimes it is necessary to ask students, nominally to answer questions or solve exercises, but when they see they are encouraged to participate, students start to feel more relaxed and ready to give answers without being called by the name.

The answers to question 6 demonstrate that a classroom atmosphere is crucial for stimulating learners to express themselves in English, especially at activities that require their direct involvement in conversations or debates. We have used these questions to draw students' attention, during the stage preparing the administration of the questionnaire, on the negative impact of the group if students who are not very good at expressing themselves in English are discouraged by the attitude and reactions of their peers (laughing, ironic remarks). Thus, 35 students found classroom atmosphere as a factor of moderate influence, while 39 argued it was a very important one.

Actually, some students have mentioned the negative influence of their colleagues in the section where they were asked to speak of factors motivating them. The following direct quotes illustrate the negative impact of a classroom atmosphere where students receive negative feedback from their group mates, or are not sufficiently confident in their ability to express themselves clearly in English: *"Personally, I did not want to talk at class activities because I knew that somebody would laugh at my pronunciation or ideas. I am part of a group where all know to judge or laugh about the others…", "The class is interesting, the teacher is encouraging, but everything will be better without those colleagues that laugh at you and make stupid remarks".*

The role of group/pair work was also considered as very important by most students (34), probably because they had the opportunity to help each-other in solving the tasks. The sitting pattern was considered moderately important by most students. In our case, it was often difficult to change the sitting pattern as the rooms in which English classes are held often have desks with a fixed structure.

The last question, number seven, was meant to identify the factors (instrumental, personal/developmental) that motivate students to take part in the English class. Based on students' responses, it appears that extrinsic factors, such as participating in the class because it is a requirement and because an exam must be passed have an important role, and it is obvious that most students felt motivated by the fact they were evaluated progressively (39 students indicated they felt very motivated to take part in the English class for the last reason mentioned here, and 38 persons felt extremely motivated in this respect). However, sub-questions c and d, indicating integrative motivation, received the highest scores, showing that most students would like to know general English and

technical English in order to get a job abroad and be able to become integrated in the culture of the respective country. An important number of students also mentioned the idea of personal development associated to learning English.

The answers to point f of question seven, asking students to indicate other reasons than the one mentioned in the questionnaire for learning English, show that most subjects are stimulated by instrumental factors. English is often perceived as an international language, which can give them the opportunity to communicate when they travel abroad, study in another country, become a better professional, able to communicate ideas and receive information in a language different than their native one, having direct access to sources (of different kinds) in English: *"I would like to speak English like a native speaker. Why? Because English is spoken by a lot of people from all the countries; it allows you to travel and meet a lot of people and discover new countries and cultures. Another reason that I want to learn this language is because I dream of picking up a book that is in English and read it without difficulty. I also think it's funny to know jokes in other languages. Of course, it is also a plus in your CV to know a foreign language". "The things that motivate me to learn English and to attend this course refer to access to a vast quantity of information, the possibility to interact with people. Knowing English opens so many opportunities for a person…", "I like a lot learning English because it is an international language, so wherever I'd be I will find someone who can understand me. I also want to learn something new every day, maybe from writers and read their works in their native language, to understand their original idea and not get a distorted one. In the future I also want to travel a lot and be able to freely interact with people from different cultures and understand their cultures…"*

Engineering English is also considered important as regards subjects' future careers or the opportunities to continue their academic education abroad, in the field of engineering:

"It has been very important for me to attend this English class. I found it very useful for me as a future engineer. Knowing engineering words in English is very important for me as a student and future engineer, especially since next year I will go abroad with Erasmus program." "I attended this English course because technical English helps me on the professional side and my personal side. I liked it because I discovered engineering English". "One of the main reasons for which I am taking part to the English class is that in this way I can further develop my English skills, especially the ones needed in the field of engineering. After I finish this college I plan to leave this country and make a career in this domain in a predominantly English-speaking country". "For me it is interesting to participate to the English classes because I can learn and speak about subjects which I heard of but I have no details about, using a foreign language at the same time"

4. CONCLUSION

The answers given by students to the questionnaire on motivation indicate that instrumental reasons remain the most important source of motivation. Most students agree that proficiency in English and knowledge of engineering words give them increased opportunities to study abroad, become more valued professionals, travel, communicate with people from around the world. Thus, many students expressed their appreciation for a course in engineering English, though they also suggested they would

enjoy doing also activities based on subjects of general interest. Next to instrumental reasons, integrative motives and personal development reasons came next.

It may also be concluded that the role of the teacher in motivating students is a crucial one, whether it refers to attitude, the feedback provided, the materials presented and the type of evaluation proposed. Students' answers, related to this factor, were by far the most coherent.

Since learning a foreign language involves interacting with others and possibly, making mistakes, the crucial importance of classroom atmosphere has also been suggested. Again, we emphasize the relevance of making students understand that language mistakes should be regarded as steps towards the mastery of a language, and not signs of some inability to use English in an appropriate way.

In the light of these findings, it can be argued that a course in technical English may be improved if teachers will bring to the class materials that students find meaningful, both in terms of the information included (real-life texts, along the pedagogical one, insisting on the introduction of concepts that will be useful for students' future careers), and as regards the possibilities they offer to students to practice communication situations they may encounter in their future careers as engineers. Ideally, learners should also be presented with opportunities to express themselves in English while discussing/writing about topics of general interest. These can be nevertheless put in connection with the field in which students want to become specialists.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize, all the time, the connection between the activities done at the engineering English class (the theoretical aspects) and the possibility to apply abstract concepts in practical contexts, i.e. associate teaching/learning processes to students' future career as engineers.

The teacher has also the important role of managing the class and its atmosphere, encouraging students to demonstrate a supportive attitude for all their colleagues and adapt activities and their completion with the abilities of students.

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