

Language learners' motivation towards English learning through the VAK model

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ABSTRACT

It has been proven that motivation is an essential factor in the learning process. In the case of learning a new language, this factor becomes even more significant, since it can determine the state of students' readiness to learn and therefore directly influences the success of language acquisition. For this reason, different teaching models have been studied that allow motivating language learners to achieve meaningful learning. One of these is the VAK model. This article presents the results of a study implemented in the Degree in Languages at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco with the objective of determining the effectiveness of the VAK model to improve student motivation and therefore the learning of the English language as L2.

Keywords: *language learning; learning styles; affective factors.*

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Motivación de los estudiantes de idiomas hacia el aprendizaje de inglés a través del modelo VAK

RESUMEN

Se ha comprobado que la motivación es un factor esencial en el proceso de aprendizaje. En el caso del aprendizaje de una nueva lengua, este factor se vuelve aún más significativo, ya que puede determinar el estado de disposición para aprender de los estudiantes y por lo tanto influye directamente en el éxito de la adquisición del idioma. Por esta razón, se han estudiado distintos modelos de enseñanza que permiten motivar a los aprendices de lenguas para lograr aprendizajes significativos. Uno de estos es el modelo VAK. En este artículo se presentan los resultados de un estudio implementado en la Licenciatura en Idiomas de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco con el objetivo de determinar la efectividad del modelo VAK para mejorar la motivación de los alumnos y por ende el aprendizaje del idioma inglés como L2.

Palabras clave: *aprendizaje de idiomas; estilos de aprendizaje; factores afectivos.*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching techniques are evolving with society to adapt to the student's needs in order to find factors that can improve their learning. Siti & Melor (2014) expresses that motivation is one of the most important factors in second language learning. A revision of literature about student's motivation towards English learning of a second language (L2) found that the issue of motivation in English learning has been studied through different models and multimedia instructions (Izquierdo, et al., 2015). Within these studies, different factors such as attitudes, feelings, emotions, and the age influence the process of learning a language. According to Zhu (2014):

A teacher might encourage his/her students by saying 'Given motivation, anyone can learn a language'. Thus, it shows in language learning that motivation is very crucial, and actually the same as aptitude, intelligence and attitudes, it is an important factor which can greatly influence the achievement of learners' second language or foreign language acquisition. (p. 1)

In this sense, according to different authors motivation is the key for learning. But what about if this motivation is used for learning English? Agreeing with Krashen (1982), motivation is the impulse and the willing to learn. Additionally, learners might pick up language unconsciously in a process that guides their behavior and actions, as well as determine the process of learning of students depending on how they feel their willingness for learning.

For Bartol & Martin (1998), motivation is the force that stimulates behavior and the conduct of the students making them more confident and impulse them to search a satisfaction of something, even a satisfaction for learning. In this way, all the authors have something in common about their definitions because all of them talk about a force or something that impulse the willing of learning or searching something that is related to the behavior and the conduct.

Therefore, motivation is a research factor for students to learn English and it has been looking over through different teaching models. Likewise, some of the studies have used multimedia instruction as an instrument to encourage students at learning English. As a result, it has had a stronger effect in students' motivation. Overall, motivation is one of the keys for learning an L2 (Véliz, 2012).

Several studies about using different strategies and models with the aim of reaching the subject of motivation on L2 learning have been applied. From the psychological perspective, plenty of studies are guided by using teaching models and strategies related to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to encourage students to learn an L2. Although, motivation has been considered from various strategies and models that show a lack of motivation in English language learners.

In addition, motivation in language learning has been approached from emotions and feelings. Méndez (2011) refers that the diverse emotions that language learners may experience during learning activities promote different affective reactions in students when they are learning English. Likewise, in the study by Faisal (2013), motivation is discussed from integrative and instrumental orientations in which it is believed that motivation has more influence for most tasks in L2 but depending on learning styles.

As mentioned previously, most of the studies have been assumed from different models and strategies. However, there are few investigations that have been approached from the Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic (VAK) teaching model, which has been used in general education as well as in the field of teaching English.

Sreenidhi & Tay (2017) states that some people learn by seeing (Visual); some people learn by hearing (Auditory); some people learn by doing (Tactile/Kinesthetic). These terms will be explained below:

- Visual: a visually dominant learner absorbs and retains information better when it is presented in, for example, pictures, diagrams, and charts.
- Auditory: an auditory dominant learner prefers listening to what is being presented. He or she responds best to voices, for example, in a lecture or group discussion. Hearing his own voice repeating something back to a tutor or trainer is also helpful.
- Kinesthetic: a kinesthetic dominant learner prefers a physical experience. She or he likes a "hands-on" approach and responds well to being able to touch or feel an object.

In this way, according to Clark (2011), learners use all three modalities to receive and learn new information and experiences. However, only one of these is dominant in a student, in which he or she is comfortable for learning. In each task or activity, the style may not be the same for learners.

However, English language teaching methods are not always suitable for learners and their learning styles. In the specific case of education in Mexico, public schools have sought to implement teaching of

English as L2, especially at the secondary, high school and university levels. Even so, various investigations have identified as one of the main problems that students feel demotivated by the strategies and models used by teachers.

According to the organization Inglés para la competitividad y la movilidad social (2015), there is a program offered for InterAmerican Partnership for Education (IAPE) addressed to Mexican teachers at public schools, which the focal aim is to prepare educators of the English language with the skill to be leaders and advise their colleagues to motivate their students at language learning. These measures have been required since it was revealed that most teachers at the secondary level do not have the pedagogical skills to teach English and in some cases do not have sufficient knowledge of the language.

Hence, the motivation becomes one of the challenges faced by those who work in education (Carvalho & De Oliveira 2015). Nevertheless, this challenge is easier to accomplish if the teacher uses teaching techniques that improve the students' motivation and the English learning through a teaching model. For this purpose, the VAK model can help both teachers and learners.

Alfin & Suyata (2018) states that with VAK model learning will be efficient by giving attention toward learning styles and discovering the potential that the students have. Consequently, the VAK model might improve students' language learning through these learning styles and bring out students' potential in learning and avoid students' demotivation and complains about the strategies as well as methods used in class.

In addition, Giraldo & Bedoya (2006) affirm that the development of a learning style (especially both auditory and visual) influences academic performance that varies according to socioeconomic levels and the competitiveness of schools.

Conversely, an important investigation carried out by Rodríguez et al. (n. d.) demonstrated that learning styles have never been an impediment to learning if the class is very complete with different activities for all types of learning styles. In this way, the VAK model does have weight in language learning, although it provides a guide as a principle to make courses more dynamic and varied.

On the other hand, motivation is one factor that has been considered to determine success or failure in second and foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Similarly, the research by Carvalho & De

Oliveira (2015) revealed significant indices for autonomous motivational behavior as a determining factor in the learner.

Furthermore, the study by Méndez (2011) exposed that students generally experience fear, happiness, worry, calm, sadness, and excitement during their learning process and that these emotions depend mostly on the attitudes of the teachers and the classroom environment, which in turn influences the general motivation to learn.

In addition, Velázquez (2012) points out that students who are in a negative emotional state obtain lower grades because they cannot study properly.

In this way, it must be considered that motivation is an important factor in the field of learning. In some cases, motivation is even more important in learning languages than cognitive factors. Thus, motivation as a significant determiner on the process of learning a foreign language has been studied for more than three decades. Therefore, giving priority to motivation in the field of learning English through the VAK model is critical.

Since language learning is a conscious process that occurs in formal learning situation, or a self-study programmed (Kramina, 2000), several factors must be involved, including emotions, and learning styles. The VAK model could deal with motivation and make students feel more stimulated for learning English while learners are improving in the field of languages thanks to the fact that this model adapts to any learning.

Finally, Filcher & Miller (2000) emphasize that motivate student to learn is an educational objective to give priority, since the student with higher motivation gets the success at learning an L2 because he becomes autonomous and interested to learn by himself. Along these lines, the motivation at L2 learning is now more researched using and proving different methods.

This study has as its objective to determine the effectiveness of VAK model in the improvement of the English language learning and the increasing of the motivation in the English language learners from the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. It is presumed that the students increase their motivation and improve in the English language learning through this model.

METHOD

The participants of this research were 10 students of the third Semester of English level at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. This group was named Group A. Also, it was determined a control group in which the intervention of the model VAK was not present, with the objective of contrast both results and analyze the impact of the VAK model in only one of the groups and the normal progress in the control group without this model of teaching. This control group was named Group B and consisted in 10 participants as well.

For this research, a mixed approach was chosen since the use of instruments with characteristics of both the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach was required at different stages of the research, as indicated by Pereira (2011). This approach allowed obtaining a broader perspective of the problem addressed.

Thus, two instruments were designed to collect the necessary data. In the first place, a test of knowledge about the English language was built, based on the learning content that students learn during the third semester of this language, and it contained 30 questions. This test was applied at the beginning of the course (Pre-test) and at the end (Post-test) to contrast the knowledge of the learners of Group A which received the teaching with the VAK model and the knowledge of the learners of Group B which received the usual teaching model that is implemented at UJAT. Besides, a questionnaire with open questions was done to examine how motivated students were in the course and the reasons they attributed to it. This instrument was applied in both groups.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Quantitative results

In the first instance, the results obtained thanks to the Pre-test that was applied to both Group A and Group B at the beginning of the semester are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1*A Group Pre-test results*

Student	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage achieved	Score
<i>A1</i>	24	6	80 %	8
<i>A2</i>	22	8	73 %	7.3
<i>A3</i>	15	15	50 %	5
<i>A4</i>	22	8	73 %	7.3
<i>A5</i>	23	7	77 %	7.7
<i>A6</i>	23	7	77 %	7.7
<i>A7</i>	21	9	70 %	7
<i>A8</i>	15	15	50 %	5
<i>A9</i>	27	3	90 %	9
<i>A10</i>	27	3	90 %	9

Note. Own elaboration based on the results obtained.

Table 2*B Group Pre-test results*

Student	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage achieved	Score
<i>B1</i>	22	8	73 %	7.3
<i>B2</i>	15	15	50 %	5
<i>B3</i>	20	10	66 %	6.6
<i>B4</i>	22	8	73 %	7.3
<i>B5</i>	25	5	83 %	8.3
<i>B6</i>	17	13	56 %	5.6
<i>B7</i>	25	5	83 %	8.3
<i>B8</i>	28	2	93 %	9.3
<i>B9</i>	18	22	60 %	6
<i>B10</i>	22	8	73 %	7.3

Note. Own elaboration based on the results obtained.

Now, Table 3 and Table 4 show the data obtained thanks to the Post-test that was applied to Group A and Group B at the end of the course.

Table 3*A Group Post-test results*

Student	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage achieved	Score
A1	30	0	100 %	10
A2	24	6	80 %	8
A3	21	9	70 %	7
A4	28	2	93 %	9.3
A5	29	1	96 %	9.6
A6	27	3	90 %	9
A7	24	6	80 %	8
A8	20	10	66 %	6.6
A9	30	0	100 %	10
A10	27	3	90 %	9

Note. Own elaboration based on the results obtained.

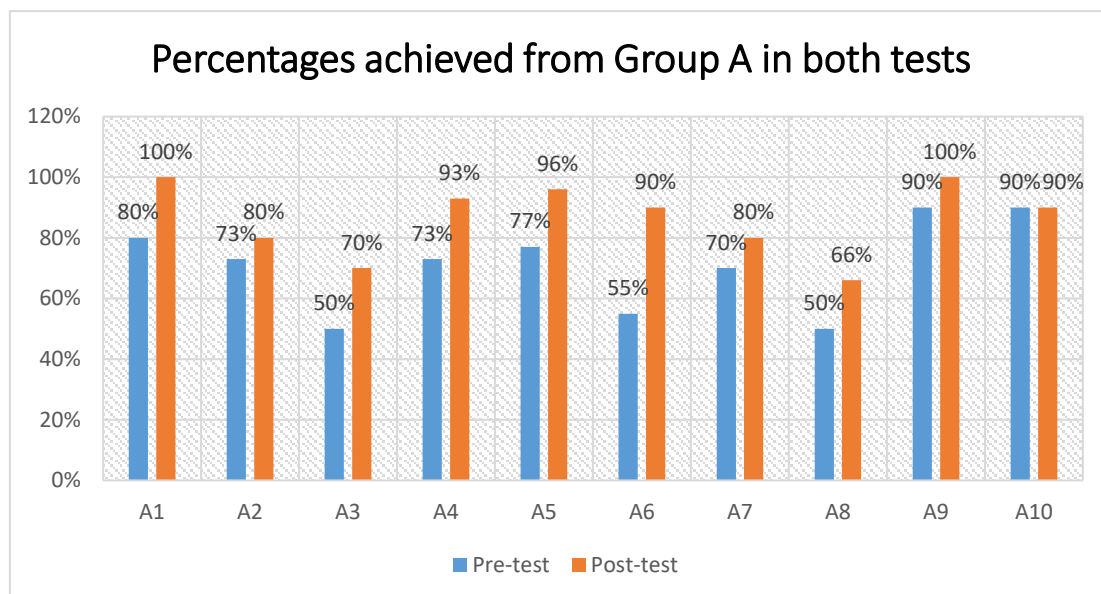
Table 4*B Group Post-test results*

Student	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage achieved	Score
B1	23	7	76 %	7.6
B2	28	2	93 %	9.3
B3	6	24	20 %	2
B4	23	7	76 %	7.6
B5	24	6	80 %	8
B6	27	3	90 %	9
B7	22	8	76 %	7.6
B8	26	4	86 %	8.6
B9	15	15	50%	5
B10	19	11	63 %	6.3

Note. Own elaboration based on the results obtained.

After observing the data obtained in the applied Tests, Figures 1 and 2 show comparisons of the percentages of correct answers obtained in Group A, where the VAK model was implemented, and those obtained in Group B where this teaching model was not implemented.

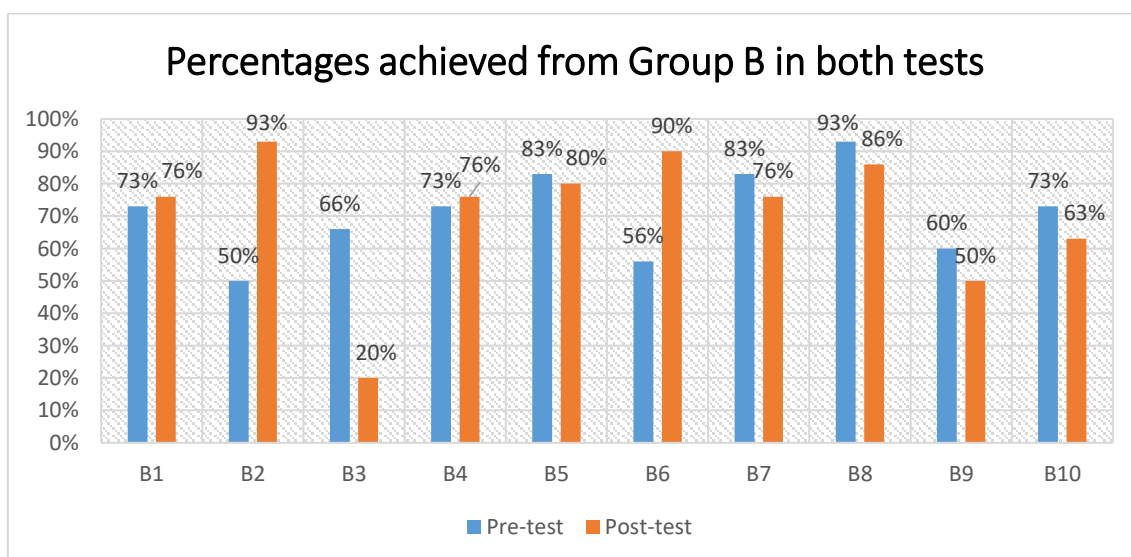
Figure 1. Comparison of percentages obtained in the Group A Tests before and after implementing the VAK model throughout the semester



Note. Own elaboration based on the results of Group A Tests.

According to the comparison made with the pre-test and the post-test of the A Group, the results showed in Figure 1 exhibit that students improved their English language knowledge significantly. Most of the students increased their first score obtained and only one of them maintained the same score. In fact, two participants achieved perfect scores on their test.

Figure 2. Comparison of percentages obtained in the Group B Tests before and after of the semester without implementing the VAK model



Note. Own elaboration based on the results of Group B Tests.

Contrasting with Group A, where the VAK model was implemented, Figure 2 shows that Group B, with which the study control was carried out, obtained lower scores in the knowledge test. Several students even obtained results lower than those they had obtained at the beginning of the semester, which may possibly indicate a regression in their learning. Also, none of the students achieved a perfect score on their test.

Qualitative results

The questionnaire showed that the Group A was really motivated and that one of the factors that helped them feel this way was the teaching model they received throughout the semester, since thanks to this they were able to better understand the lessons and therefore obtain good grades. They expressed that the interactive activities that were used and done in class with the use of different learning styles helped to acquire the language, which can be obtained with the VAK model as indicated by Rodríguez et al. (n. d.).

Nevertheless, the questionnaire of the Group B was analyzed and was found that students were not motivated at the end of the course, because they asked for interactive and dynamic activities in class that were not boring and repetitive. Thus, unlike Group A, in Group B the demotivation due to the teaching model they received influenced the academic performance of the students (Giraldo & Bedoya, 2006).

Another of the findings of this study is that for the students in the control group there was confusion about certain topics that the teacher did not explain completely clearly, because only written exercises were used but there were no visual demonstrations on various contents, especially about vocabulary. This information is also reflected in the scores obtained at the end of the semester, since several students even lowered their scores obtained at the beginning in the Pre-test. In this sense, it can be emphasized that it is necessary that the teaching models are adequate for the different learning styles.

In this way, the results obtained showed clearly that students that were under the application of the model VAK felt more motivated to learn English at the end of the class than the students of the control group. Therefore, their academic performance was better, and this was reflected in their scores at the end of the course.

Therefore, it can be ensured that the motivation that students have when receiving a teaching model adapted to their needs is essential for success in acquiring L2 knowledge, as argued by authors such as Dörnyei (2001) and Carvalho & De Oliveira (2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The VAK model is an effective method that uses the Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic learning styles that increase the students' motivation for learning English and improve the English language learning as well.

The use of Visual activities helps students to associate words and images or charts with specific grammar rules. The Auditory ones helps those students who learn best in this way by hearing their partners, conversations, recordings and even audiobooks. The Kinesthetic activities make students associate the vocabulary with the movement or smell.

In conclusion, when the teaching model is adapted to the needs of all students, there is a better performance in the classroom thanks to the fact that everyone can acquire the necessary knowledge to improve their level in L2.

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