

Demotivation as a Factor in the Performance of EFL Teachers in the Catholic University of Santiago de Guayaquil, Ecuador

La Desmotivación en el Desempeño de los Docentes de EFL en la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil, Ecuador

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigated demotivating factors for teachers of English as a Foreign Language in the Catholic University of Guayaquil, and proposed actions to combat them. The project included surveys, interviews, extended diaries, and also class observations of teachers at work, which showed the correlation between a teacher's self-defined state of demotivation and performance in class, and thus the degree of importance or relevance to be attached to the concept of EFL teacher demotivation.

Keywords: Demotivation, education, teaching, English

RESUMEN:

El estudio pretendió investigar los factores desmotivadores en los docentes de inglés como Lengua Extranjera en la Universidad Católica de Guayaquil, y proponer acciones para enfrentarlos. El proyecto incluyó encuestas, entrevistas y diarios extendidos, y también unas observaciones en aula para determinar la correlación entre un estado de desmotivación auto-definido de un docente y la evidencia de su desempeño en el aula y, como resultado, hasta qué grado es importante o relevante el concepto de la desmotivación del docente.

Palabras clave: Desmotivación, educación, enseñanza, inglés.

1. Introduction

The aim was to identify the principal demotivating factors for EFL teachers at the university and establish their effect on the teachers' performance.

This was the first study of the topic in Ecuador and in Latin America. It used multiple investigation methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative, and, additionally teacher class observations. It also looked into the importance or relevance of the concept of teacher

demotivation.

In order to gain a clear understanding of the concept of demotivation, it is first necessary to take a brief look at that of motivation. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, "motivation" means "enthusiasm for doing something." According to Harold Koontz, (1999) "motivation is a general term which is applied to a wide series of stimuli, desires, necessities, desires, and similar forces.". According to Ricardo F. Solana, (1993) "Motivation is, in synthesis, what makes an individual act and behave in a certain manner. It is a combination of intellectual, physiological, and psychological processes which decide, in a given situation, with what degree of energy one should act, and in which direction one should channel one's energy."

One of the best-known theories is Maslow's pyramid. In his work published in "Psychological Review", "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943), he explains a hierarchical basis for motivation: satisfaction at any given level is dependent upon lower levels already having been satisfied. Herzberg (1959) proposed that hygiene factors are external to work, for example, working conditions, organisational policies, and personal relations. Motivation factors, on the other hand are directly linked to work: recognition, pay, independence, successes and positive stimuli, among others. In comparison with Maslow's work, the hygiene factors were equivalent to physiological, security and social necessities, and the motivational factors were similar to the need for esteem and self-fulfilment. McClelland's work (1988) was also based on a theory of necessity. His three fundamental ideas are:

1. Achievement: the drive to achieve success and be well-regarded
2. Power: the drive to gain influence and recognition
3. Affiliation: the drive to maintain satisfactory personal relations and feel part of a group

We can also distinguish external and internal factors. "Extrinsic" motivation is a "bribe": a salary rise, the promise of an ice cream if a child is well behaved. It has immediate or short-term motivational value, and loses effect with time. "Intrinsic" motivation applies in other circumstances and is more complex. For example, undertaking activities which we enjoy. This motivation comes from something psychologically deep, a pleasure, an enthusiasm derived from within the person.

Demotivation is different from the absence of motivation, known as "amotivation". According to Deci and Ryan (1985), amotivation is "the relative absence of motivation, which is not caused by an initial absence of interest, but by feelings of incompetence or importance when confronting an activity". Demotivation, was described by Dörnyei (2005) as "specific external forces which reduce or diminish the motivational basis for behaviour". That is to say, if a motivational force pushes one forward, the corresponding demotivational force pushes in the opposite direction - pushing backwards.

A study in Qingdao University of Science and Technology in China includes a brief review of five previous investigations (Yan, 2009):

1. Christophel y Gorham (1995) asserted that demotivation is caused by teachers' actions.
 2. Oxford (1998) identified 4 types of demotivating factors: the relationship between teachers and students, the teacher's attitude toward the material, style conflicts between teacher and students, and the nature of the class activities. This recognised the role of the teacher as a possible demotivating factor.
 3. Chambers (1993), saw teachers laying blame on students, and vice versa, establishing the importance of communication and cooperation between the two groups.
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2. Methodology

The first stage of the investigation was an analysis of the final grades of all EFL students in all English levels in the two preceding semesters, with the teachers identified for each course, and average grades calculated. This permitted, later in the study, analysis of the correlation between teachers self-identified as demotivated and their academic results.

The fieldwork was undertaken in the university campus.

1- A questionnaire was prepared for the teachers, which had regard to surveys published in the literature in order to incorporate an element of continuity. It listed possible causative

factors to be selected.

2- Teachers were interviewed to establish in a more detailed manner which were the day-to-day factors in the academic environment causing stress, anxiety, or negative feelings in relation to work. For logistical and time considerations, the number interviewed was less than the total population of EFL teachers.

3- Extended dialogues were organised with 2 teachers to obtain a detailed description of the teachers' day to day experience teaching in class. This element was very personal and not amenable to statistical extrapolation, but nevertheless provided a distinct and valuable additional perspective.

4- Classroom observations were undertaken to see the extent to which those teachers who had defined themselves as demotivated manifested it while teaching, with special reference to the learning atmosphere maintained and the way in which the teacher managed potentially difficult or problematic situations. It was an opportunity to see if feelings of demotivation, if the teacher had them, affected the way he/she managed the class. A strong connection would emphasise the importance of such demotivating factors and the need to address them. At the other extreme, the absence of a visible or obvious connection would lead to the conclusion that they are unimportant in terms of day-to-day academic performance.

The results were analysed, conclusions drawn and recommendations made.

The final outcome of the project would be a conclusion that either (a) there was a consensus among the teachers on demotivating factors, or, (b) there is no such consensus. In the event of (a), recommendations for change would be made, and in the case of (b) actions would be less possible to prescribe.

3. Results

3.1. Initial Findings

The initial finding from the analysis of final grades was that the difference in grades between the most successful students and the weakest ones is very wide and appears to justify interventions to improve academic processes.

The position when analysing the average grades by individual teacher was that there were wide variations between the grading of different teachers within the same English levels. There was no correlation with class size, which flies in the face of the conventional wisdom that students can learn better in small classes.

Flowing from the above, one may take two quite different views. On the one hand, that there is little to be gained from comparing the grades achieved by teachers with their state of motivation or demotivation when the pattern of grades is so variable. On the other hand, that the final grades are made up of a mix of "objective" elements, where there is a correct or incorrect answer, as in most of the formal exams, and more "subjective" elements, such as written work, speaking, etc., where there is room for influence by the teacher's mood, state of mind, sense of humour, motivation, absence of motivation or sense of demotivation. And, therefore, consideration of the academic effect of being, or not being demotivated, is relevant.

3.2. The Formal Survey

In the formal survey, a format was used derived mainly from those developed by Kassabgy (2001), and Yau (2010), containing a list of factors relevant to demotivation of EFL teachers, and inviting respondents to categorise on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from very motivating to very demotivating. The document was written in English, but also translated into Spanish to ensure optimum understanding and results. In the end, 17/22 teachers responded (77.27% of the population).

3.3. The Teacher Interviews

Teachers were interviewed in semi-guided form to give them more opportunity to describe and explain factors affecting their motivation / demotivation, using a lightly predefined structure, which still gave them the possibility of mentioning unanticipated circumstances and considerations. Interviews took up to 60 minutes, on a "saturation point" approach.

In contrast to the inevitably rapid and superficial process of completing a questionnaire, the interviews permitted the airing of complexities and subtle points, which could not be referred to on a form. To encourage the teachers to be more relaxed and disposed to express their views freely and frankly, the interviews were not recorded, but handwritten notes were taken.

Due to limitations of time and logistics, 17 / 22 teachers were interviewed.

Referring to initial motivation to choose the teaching profession, nearly all interviewees referred to the desire to undertake key teaching activities, like interaction with others, working with students, speaking English, and contributing to society, describing a sense of vocation. Only 4 comments were more "prosaic", like simple chance, or someone else's suggestion. It appeared, therefore, that the majority started off with an intrinsic sense of motivation, with corresponding expectations.

This was closely connected with the topic of day-to-day levels of motivation, and whether they felt there was a difference between their expectations and reality. Interestingly, 50% indicated a steady level of motivation, with the other 50% saying it was variable.

Significantly, each teacher referred to different demotivating factors, with implications for relevant corrective actions.

There were 46 comments on positive factors, of which 37 focussed on the students, their attitudes, and behaviour. They said that teaching was not just "any job" and several that they were motivated by "students who treat me as adviser and friend". (It is debateable whether this is an appropriate professional relationship. Those who referred to "liking to see students enthusiastic, happy, enjoying their time and being successful" were in a more reasonable position. This is a topic meriting further investigation.)

Of those citing negative factors, 55% also mentioned the students, those who were indifferent, not bothering to work, demotivated, uncommitted, behaving badly, not obeying rules, or only wanting to finish as quickly as possible.

If students are viewed as "external" factors affecting the teachers, the question arises why are there positive and negative students? There is a conceptual risk, and absence of logic, in characterising a teacher with high grades and happy, enthusiastic students, as a good teacher, but one with uncommitted, uninterested students with low grades as being "unfortunate" in receiving such students.

It may be argued that a new student is "innocent" or "neutral", ready to be motivated or demotivated by the teacher, or, that he/she has an attitude already formed by previous experience, and so is an "external" factor constituting the teacher's good or bad luck. Whichever way, there is a need for a consistent position as to whether, during, and at the end of the course, he/she is a factor or result.

Which position is more reasonable? The actor with most power in the classroom is the teacher. It is the teacher who plans the class, chooses teaching strategies, preferred methods, deals with events, uses his/her abilities and shows his/her personality. The teachers is managing and directing. As seen in the class observations, some teach in a way which probably motivates the students and others do the opposite. All other things being equal, students are affected, to a degree, for good or ill, by the way the teacher teaches, and by their own pre-existing attitudes, and some are more open to being influenced by the teachers than others.

Turning to relations with administrators or work colleagues, out of 39 comments, 28 were negative. This is concerning, because, after allowing for the 6 referring to physical environmental elements, there were 28 directly referring to personnel.

Suggestions were requested for things which should be changed in the university to increase teacher motivation and job satisfaction and, not surprisingly, there were references to some of the negative factors already referred to. Nevertheless, there were new elements, including increased job security, increased salary, fewer irregularities in receipt of payment, and more training.

Finally, only 2 teachers stated that they had ever considered changing their job or profession, which leads to the conclusion that, in spite of negative comments, most are relatively content, in general terms. Therefore, in an echo of the earlier question, "does demotivation matter if it doesn't affect the teacher's behaviour in the classroom?", one might ask, "does demotivation matter if they don't contemplate changing their job?"

3.4. Case Studies / Extended Diaries

Case studies were included to provide an additional idiopathic/qualitative perspective. Two teachers kept daily diaries of their events and feelings as they taught, accompanied by conversations with the investigator. They noted changes in their motivational state, and what occasioned them. Being two different people, with different personalities, age, and experiences, they reacted differently, and that what affected one did not necessarily affect the other.

3.5. Class Observations

Nine teachers were observed. Of the group of teachers who filled in the questionnaires and were interviewed, five indicated they felt demotivated, on a scale from slightly demotivated, through demotivated, to very demotivated. Only one teacher said he was very demotivated.

Of the nine teachers observed, the observers considered that five of them showed no sign in class of being demotivated, in three cases there was some sign of possible demotivation, and in just one case there was considered to be a clear sign of demotivation.

Of the five teachers who indicated any level of demotivation, two showed it. Of the four who did not indicate demotivation, three showed demotivation in their behaviour. Of the five who indicated demotivation in their behaviour, two were self-defined as demotivated.

There was, therefore, a weak correlation. What can be concluded from that? There are various possibilities:

- 1- Lack of teacher self-awareness (perhaps no different to any person)
- 2- Teachers unwilling to admit such a feeling (perhaps afraid of damaging their image)
- 3- Differences of view between teachers as to what constitutes demotivation
- 4- Differences of view between different observers as to what constitutes demotivation
- 5- The fact that anybody, in any field of activity has good days and bad ones (remembering that some teachers said they had varying levels of motivation from one day to another)
- 6- The fact that, in all social science investigations, the mere presence of an observer may affect the activity observed. Some teachers remain calm under observation, some become nervous.

Two results stood out: that the cause of teachers' positive moods was, above all, seeing their students successful, and that poorly performing students were also the source of their frustrations. There is thus a possible vicious circle, with each principal actor affecting the other. Another cause of frustration and possibly demotivation were factors outside the teachers' control, such as for example, slow or non-functioning internet, dirty toilets, or unpunctual behaviour.

There have been many definitions of demotivation in the literature, but these definitions are not necessarily helpful in the context of the present investigation. On the one hand, motivation can be clearly observed in a teacher, by way of expression of enthusiasm, a positive mood, interest, use of imagination, etc. But, demotivation, on the other hand, is not always to be seen by way of the absence of these elements. One may take the view that if

motivation exists, then, logically, one might expect to encounter the opposite. But, consider the maxim "If you want to understand something, watch what people do". In the case of demotivation, every type of observed behaviour has its own possible explanation, without need to refer to "demotivation". One of the observed teachers used boring old-fashioned methods, demonstrating lack of imagination, with endless repetition, giving no opportunity to pupils to exercise creativity. This could be categorised as demotivation, because the teacher was not showing behaviours typical of a motivated teacher. But, all the evidence in relation to this teacher might be explained differently. Perhaps he/she was motivated, but (a) has limited ability, (b) was making every effort, but lacked training, (c) believed he/she was an excellent teacher and his/her methods were appropriate, (d) considered the most important goal for students was to get good grades (which is the opinion of many students) and that the strategies employed, although "traditional", were appropriate for that, (e) was tired, (f) was worried about personal problems, or (g) was simply having a bad day. That is to say, there is neither the space nor the need for a concept of "demotivation", which adds nothing useful to the observation or understanding of behaviour.

In day-to-day practice, what matters in the classroom is the way in which the teacher teaches - attitude, ability, knowledge, strategies, methods, behaviour, communication and transactions with students, and the resulting learning atmosphere. If in fact some teachers feel demotivation, but there is little or no correlation with their behaviour, then it is irrelevant to the performance of EFL teaching in the university.

3.6. Summary of Results

The use of multiple investigation methods in this project, from nomothetic to idiopathic, with additional methods to complement these two, in contrast with the majority of preceding investigations using only one or two methods, was validated in its provision of differing perspectives. It is worth noting that, in this investigation, there are differing results as between the survey and the interviews. This is not surprising, because they are different tools. There is a danger in supposing that, because the results are derived from the same respondents, they should be similar. That is not the case. Neither the survey nor the interview is a neutral tool. The participants respond differently to each, and there are reasons for expecting differing results. They should not be regarded as confirmatory or contradictory, but complementary, and they are analysed separately, using methods appropriate for seeing if there are common messages within both groups of data.

The concept of demotivation in the context of teacher performance is a theoretical/logical construct which does not help a great deal in behavioural understanding. It does not have universal applicability in relation to teaching and should be used cautiously, with due consideration of its usefulness and relevance.

Even if one considers that the concept is usable with reference to teacher work and behaviour, it appears more-or-less irrelevant, due to the absence of correlation between the expression of such sentiment and the behaviour of the teacher in class. It is not a useful tool for addressing the need to improve academic performance.

There are different views between teachers on what is an appropriate relationship between them and students. In one sense, it depends on the teacher's personality, but, nevertheless, it appears preferable to maintain a "professional distance".

Preceding investigations have treated the topic of good and bad students as external factors motivating or demotivating teachers. Observation suggests that this may not be so, and that, to a degree, good and bad pupils are the result of the attitudes and practices of the teachers themselves.

The demotivators identified overwhelmingly focussed on the students themselves, but the range of other factors cited pointed to the individuality of the teachers and therefore recommended actions must avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Although the project has mostly an academic focus, there were clear teacher indications that some demotivators relate to management, administration, rules and how they applied, and organisational culture.

3.7. Results in Relation to the Hypothesis

The project tested the hypothesis;

The principal demotivating factors in teaching EFL are (a) a proportion of the students, (b) the absence of necessary teaching skills, and, (c) equipment failings or failures. Additionally, that a teacher's demotivation does not necessarily manifest itself behaviourally.

Taking the four parts of the hypothesis in turn:

(a) A proportion of the students

The following factors were included in the survey: (i) Relationship with the students: 16 / 17 teachers surveyed expressed positive levels of motivation. (ii) Student behaviour: a different position here. 7 / 17 teachers surveyed (41%) indicated a neutral or negative position, not positive.

In considering the difference between these two results, one must take into account that normally the subject responds rapidly to questions in a questionnaire, without much reflection. On being confronted with the theme of the relationship, it is difficult for a professional teacher to admit to not having a positive relationship, because it touches on a basic expectation of a capable teacher. But, with regard to student behaviour, this is a more concrete topic, and it is relatively easy to recall instances of misbehaviour, such as, for example, students chatting in the class instead of working, those who do not answer questions, etc.

Interviews with teachers produced different results. On being asked what are the principal demotivators, inside or outside the classroom? and can you recall a negative event when working with students which made you feel bad or dissatisfied with your work? of the 46 comments, 26 (56.5%) referred to students who behave badly or have a bad attitude, with 7 of the 9 most frequent comments focussed on this. In contrast to the survey, respondents in the interviews had more time to think and recall. The extended diaries/conversations permitted even more time to reflect, however, they were only two teachers and therefore were not a basis for extrapolation, but nevertheless interesting and relevant in revealing individual personal perspectives.

It is worth considering the relative importance of the extended diary/conversation method. For the individual teacher, global statistics are of minor importance. Each teacher/actor is an individual human being, not a standardised robot, and what affects him and, perhaps, demotivates him, are factors touching his individual sensibilities. This underlines the necessity of personalisation rather than standardisation as the more appropriate route toward improvement in satisfaction of teacher needs and desires. The comments in the diaries showed an element of frustration with the students, together with some other administrative elements.

It was concluded that part (a) of the hypothesis was validated

(b) lack of relevant teaching abilities

The survey touched on the training provided for the teachers. Five teachers checked negative, six positive and six with a neutral position. With 65% indicating negative or neutral, it was clearly an unsatisfactory position from the teachers' perspective.

It was concluded that part (b) of the hypothesis was validated

(c) equipment shortcomings

This was included because students learning English at the university had indicated this was their most important demotivator, especially regarding audio-visual equipment and computers. It was important to know if it was accorded the same importance by the teachers. Only two teachers declared demotivation, nine indicated positive, but the most common position was neutral. On a related, but more precisely-defined question, referring to "audio-visual and technology", a different picture emerged. The majority indication was that of demotivation or neutral. In the interviews, there were only 7 negative comments,

referencing old, ill-maintained, non-functioning, or missing equipment. There were also references to this in the extended diaries/dialogues. These are daily occurrences irritating the teachers. They seem minor, but make the difference between a class which goes ahead smoothly as planned, and one which is knocked off course by equipment problems.

It was concluded that part (c) of the hypothesis was validated

The last part of the hypothesis was:

Additionally, that it is not automatically obvious that a teacher's demotivation will affect teaching behaviour.

This was a fundamental aspect. The investigation probed the principal teacher demotivating factors but, after identifying them, the question was posed "what do they matter?" If there is no difference between behaviour in class of motivated and demotivated teachers, the demotivation has no impact on the performance of the teacher or of the university. The question of any moral responsibility of a concerned employer lay outside the scope of the investigation. The project undertook class observations to determine whether or not demotivation was evidenced. The survey, the interviews, and the extended diaries/dialogues, deal with mere words - opinions, assertions - which may or may not have a relationship with truth and reality. It is always possible that a survey respondent or interviewee is lying, exaggerating, or just repeating conventional wisdom. But from classroom observations it was concluded that there was a weak correlation between teachers labelling themselves as demotivated and any such demotivation being behaviourally evidenced in class.

Therefore, the last part of the hypothesis, "that it is not automatically obvious that a teacher's demotivation will affect teaching behaviour" was validated.

4. Conclusions

The teachers saw students as the principal factor determining their emotional state and attitude in their daily work, and their level of motivation or demotivation. It was also reflected in some comments in the extended diaries/dialogues. Enthusiastic students carrying out their work punctually and correctly, ready to ask and answer questions and offer comments, exhibiting good manners and thanking the teacher for his work and support, make him/her feel encouraged. On the other hand, teachers with lazy students, not bothering to work, only attending because they have to, spending their time chatting, are seen as significant demotivators and a percentage of the teachers defined themselves as demotivated because of these factors.

Having regard to this situation which, according to the literature, is not atypical, it was concluded that certain actions should be recommended:

1- EFL teaching is a soft social activity, unlike, for example, an automobile factory, in which assembly line employees have to work in a precisely-defined manner, and are replaceable by robots. It is in the nature of the activity that each teacher has his individual abilities and personal characteristics, as do students. This has fundamental implications for any teacher-training programme. As evidenced in the class observations, there are teachers who can create a positive, dynamic, enjoyable atmosphere, and teachers who cannot. So there cannot be a one-size-fits-all training scheme. There are many different teaching methodologies and views on best practice, some favoured by those in charge of teacher training programmes. When designing such programmes, it is inadvisable to impose favoured methodologies and best practices as obligatory quick-fixes. That is the enemy of creativity and avoids the need to think what is the most appropriate way forward. It is ironic if teachers, charged with supporting students in developing their own ways of thinking, are not permitted to develop their own individual ways of teaching. It is recommended that, in the training programme, the focus should be in sessions delivered in English, indicating a wide range of practices, leaving it to teachers' discretion to "pick-and-mix". Nevertheless, if there are individual teachers unwilling or unable to change, or display creativity or imagination, in those cases it would be appropriate to say that they should adopt the practices recommended.

2- Mostly, the literature regards students as external motivating or demotivating factors relative to teachers. Thus teachers are seen as passive recipients of positive or negative students, and who, if they are lucky, receive motivated ones, and if unlucky, demotivated ones. And, in the latter case, this justifies "blaming" the students as factors, along with uncomfortable classrooms, non-functioning technology, etc. The illogic here is that the teachers emphasised the importance of training, and the *raison d'être* of training is, *inter alia*, to increase the power of the teacher to change the student from being demotivated to motivated. Therefore, given this ability, it is more realistic to define the demotivated student not as an external factor but as a product of the teacher's activity. In a separate informal discussion, at a training session, teachers recognised it was a mixture of the two, dependent upon the ability and behaviour of the teachers, and the character of the group of students in question. And therefore they agreed that teaching methodologies employed should be discretionary for each teacher and not imposed in the name of standardisation. It is recommended that a separate investigation be undertaken of the extent to which demotivated students are external factors or products of teachers' performance.

3- Some teachers said, in the survey and in interviews, that they need more training, but that it should be delivered in English. They also favoured being given opportunities for training in either the US or UK. This is recommended.

4- The classroom observations were an atypical feature of the investigation. Such observations in themselves are nothing new, but in this case, they had a different objective, namely to test whether those teachers considering themselves to be demotivated evidenced this behaviourally. It was clear that there was only a weak correlation, leading to the conclusion that, from the point of view of the efficiency and effectiveness of English teaching at the university, consideration of the level of motivation / demotivation of the teachers was almost an irrelevance because performance was independent of that level. The project stopped short of recommending that the university ignore it because of the separate human resources issue of the responsibilities of a concerned employer. However, the observations revealed another important fact. The teachers observed used a wide range of teaching methodologies, from the relatively traditional to the relatively modern, or, "21st century". But the teaching / learning atmosphere observed - whether dynamic, enthusiastic, animated, or boring, tedious, repetitive, mechanical, did not correlate with the methods used. In fact, interestingly, in the most inadequate class and the most successful one the teachers used almost the same traditional methods. That is not necessarily an argument in favour of the use of those particular methods, but simply goes to show that the success or otherwise of a class does not derive mainly from the methodology used by the teacher, but rather from the teacher's personality. In the comparison mentioned, one teacher was an extrovert, always smiling and joking, and with the ability to get on well with anybody, naturally friendly and able to "connect" with students, and the other was the opposite and relatively "unconnected". It is recommended that the training programmes for the teachers be not focussed principally on methodologies as such, still less on standardising them, but more on techniques for creating a good positive atmosphere in the classroom. This does not mean teaching methodologies are unimportant or that it is not valuable to be able to utilise a wide range of such methods, but rather that it is not the overall priority.

The analysis throws up several further general background conclusions upon which to reflect:

1 Teachers are human beings, not standardised, not robots, and so are their students. So, the two principal actors in the class interact in different ways, with different outcomes, and there appears to be no prospect of standardisation, to arrive at equal results (even if that were seen as desirable).

2- There are environmental and contextual factors which also have effects - as, for example, the physical space, furniture, equipment, class times, the climate (that of Guayaquil, where the university is situated, is a climate of tropical extremes), the students' family circumstances, the private resources available, etc. To further complicate this, there is a school of thought which holds that a good teacher can be successful whatever the surrounding circumstances.

3- There is a temptation to blame a teacher with a high level of failures, as there is one with no failures, but it would be unreasonable to do so. The university should address the question of, in an "ideal" world, what percentage of students should pass and fail? (A difficult question, which is not solved by imposing a normal distribution on the final grades, as that throws up its own problems).

4- Why does the failure rate reduce with progression up the levels of English? The students may be increasing their knowledge and understanding, but at the same time, the work and the exams should also be getting more difficult. Is it that the regime is too difficult at the beginning and too easy later on? Or simply that the students are becoming more mature young adults as time passes and therefore more aware of the need to apply themselves to their courses?

The above considerations do not in any sense invalidate the present inquiry, but rather just go to show how complex and imperfect is the subject matter and that there are, inevitably, more questions than answers. And indeed that any proffered simple answers should be treated with suspicion.

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