

BUILDING CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: INSPIRING TECHNICALLY-ORIENTED STUDENTS TO LEARN SPANISH

Alexandra Burghilea-Arabu
Lecturer, PhD, National University of Science and Technology "Politehnica"
Bucharest

Abstract: The main goal of this presentation is to analyze some successful strategies that teachers can use in order to motivate university students who are studying Spanish as a foreign language. The profile of our students includes people aged between 19 and 23, engineers, having a technical background, and who wish to become an intercultural mediator and to discover more about Spanish language and culture. The method followed in this instance is educational research and the motivation types that characterize the learner's behavior: intrinsic (which goes from inner curiosity and inner satisfaction) and extrinsic (which comes from a reward or punishment given by the outside). Motivation for learning is individual and depends on the student. Therefore, a thing that works well with one student, may not be the case with another, so the ability to be flexible and creative in the pedagogical approaches is very important. From our point of view, there are basic strategies that can make a real difference in classroom motivation. One of the most important strategies is to develop clear and obtainable objectives, as teachers need to design tasks and goals that are difficult, yet achievable, and well communicated. If students know what is expected of them and perceive themselves as being able to accomplish that which is expected, then they will more likely remain engaged and confident. Well-defined directions promote motivation and decrease stress.

Another principle is to apply the performance-results method. This involves acknowledging student effort with proper reward, feedback, and, if necessary; reasonable discipline. Motivation can be enhanced if students are able to perceive a definite connection between effort and result. External (grades, praise) and internal (self-satisfaction, growth) reinforcement are included. In a nutshell, we can certainly affirm that motivation isn't about making students work harder, it's about making them feel connected, supported, and excited about what they're learning. When students truly care about what they're doing, motivation just falls into place.

Keywords: education, motivation, learning strategies, motivational strategies, educational rewards, classroom collaboration, Spanish language, active learning, linguistic knowledge.

1. Introduction

The integration of foreign language learning into technical curricula helps not only simplest mobility and employability however but also enhances intercultural communication competencies and get right of entry to global research and innovation. While technical students frequently face demanding situations in language acquisition because of a curriculum focused on medical rigor, tailor-made didactic procedures can bridge this hole. The improvement of specialized language programs tailored to the wishes of technical fields can provide students with sensible tools for real-world professional interplay. Thus, foreign language competence will become a key element in shaping globally competitive graduates, capable of adapting to an unexpectedly evolving and interconnected expert environment.

2. Analytical framework

Language knowledge contributes to the establishment of educational and professional partnership with universities and institutions in the Spanish speaking world, as well as participation in dynamics, internships or cooperation in the field of engineering. The Spanish teaching approach for technicians and students at different levels is based on a communicative approach oriented toward specific goals. To be more specific, students learn to speak in real-

life situations within the professional and technical field. The objective is none other than to be able to defend themselves professionally in their field, whether orally or in writing.

To have a better understanding of the methodological part, we will present the techniques applied at all language levels, starting with students who have a basic level of Spanish (A1) and continuing through to students who speak this Romance language at levels C1-C2.

At the initial levels (A1-A2), students work with basic technical vocabulary, that is, part of a tool, the names of materials to be used, a simple process, and functional grammatical structures such as the present indicative, simple imperatives, and basic instructions.

If the student is able to reach a more intermediate level (B1-B2), he will delve into more difficult tasks such as **writing a more formal email, detailing a procedure, reading a device manual, and participating in a business meeting, simulation of an interview, cover letters, etc.** In addition, at this point, teachers will use the past and future tenses, as well as conditional structures. We should not forget about the speaking activities and team work exercises.

Advanced students involved in learning a foreign language having a C1 and C2 levels are eventually submerged, depending on their profiles, in the area of **specialized discourse production, namely technical presentations, report writing activities or DELE exam simulations.**

At this stage, accuracy in the technical area of language teaching, fluency, and linguistic aptitude are interrelated elements with grammar, vocabulary, and theory. Methodologically, in our Spanish classes, we use authentic tasks such as **simulations of work situations, group technical problem-solving, and analysis of authentic industry documentation.** Learning must be meaningful, that is, related to students' prior knowledge in their professional field, thus facilitating motivation to learn and content retention.

It is also very useful to incorporate **visual materials (diagrams, flowcharts, maps)** and audiovisual materials that represent the students' needs, **technical background in conjunction with technology (learning platforms, technical vocabulary apps industrial process videos)** to support the content and foster autonomous practicing opportunities.

As a general conclusion of this part, we consider that this metalanguage should be flexible and practical, catering to the actual needs of technical students, with clear progression paths from functional and basic to highly specialized technical communication, always within relevant contexts from their professional profiles.

3. Putting theory into practice

In order to illustrate the ideas exposed until now, we provide illustrative examples of exercises and texts used in our instructional approach, that we utilize in the classroom as part of our methodology, carefully selected and adapted to the student's level of linguistic competence and the needs of communication proper to the technical scope. Such materials allow the development of particular skills in situational professional contexts, adjusting themselves to the level of teachers and to the nature of the group, ensuring a smooth progression and meaningful learning related to their professional practice.

We must mention that we have left the illustrative text in its original Spanish form for greater clarity and originality.

Read the following text and comment on whether or not you identify with Andrei's routine.

En general, mi día en la universidad empieza temprano, sobre las 8:00 a m. Normalmente, me despierto a las 7 a. m. para tener tiempo de prepararme. Después de un desayuno rápido, que suele consistir en un café y unas tostadas, tomo el autobús a la universidad. Las clases empiezan a las 8:30. Casi todos los días asisto a dos o tres asignaturas por la mañana. Hoy tengo clases de Historia y Literatura. En la primera clase, el profesor explica un tema interesante sobre La Revolución Francesa. Disfruto mucho de la asignatura,

así que presto toda mi atención. Luego hacemos un breve descanso para charlar con mis compañeros. En la segunda clase, repasamos una obra literaria famosa. A veces trabajamos en grupos, así que comentamos los puntos principales del libro; esto me ayuda a comprender mejor la obra y me mantiene activo en clase. La clase de la mañana termina sobre las 12:30 y voy a comer al comedor de la universidad. Normalmente como mucho, ya sea ensalada o un sándwich. Después de comer, tengo algo de tiempo libre antes de mi siguiente clase y siempre lo dedico a estudiar o repasar mis apuntes. Las clases de la tarde incluyen matemáticas y una tutoría con uno de mis profesores. A veces le pido ayuda en la tutoría con problemas que no entiendo muy bien. Al terminar la clase, vuelvo a casa, donde suelo estudiar un poco más y luego descansar un rato.

Beginner Level:

- a) Write a short text (5-6 sentences) about a typical day in your life. Use expressions like: *Me despierto a las...; Desayuno...; Voy a la escuela /universidad...; Tengo clases de...; Como...; Por La tarde...; Por La noche...*
- b) Oral extension: Read the text aloud or tell it to a partner.

Intermediate Level:

- a) Write a coherent and structured narrative about a different university day, in the past or present tense. You can use connectives like: *primero, después, luego, más tarde, finalmente, porque, aunque, mientras, cuando, entonces.*

Advanced Level:

Students receive the photograph shown above, based on it, must express their opinion on the topic of stress in students' lives, whether or not they identify with the boy in the photo. The next question relates to the ways they use to concentrate or relax when studying or working.

4. Final considerations

Whether we talk about a science student or a student in another engineering field, when it comes to learn a new language, such as Spanish, this process will usually depend on their perception of its value in the real world. Unlike other profiles, **engineering students have a more utilitarian attitude towards learning, and they are severely interested in the language in which they begin to see relations between linguistic knowledge and their career.** Many of them require language to communicate at work, read a technical manual, talk with a colleague in Spanish, or even decide whether to get a master's degree in Spain or Latin America or not. Thus, language is no longer considered as a separate essential subject, but as a practical tool that can separate them in its professional future.

To increase this level, learning strategies must be applied that suits students' technical profile and cognitive style. These tasks should be **meaningful and material-based, that is, their functions are related to the environment and special interests.**

Instead of offering standardized exercises, it is best to use **real-world content**, so students should work with video with manual, drawing, technical sheets, product sheets, work email, or step-by-step clarification. Through these materials, students will not only increase their language proficiency, but will also get more technical terminology in a multicultural environment. To maintain and highlight this inspiration, it is important to use a learning strategy that is suited to both the student's technical profile and their cognitive style. **The practice should be designed to reflect reality and be relevant**, in other words, their specific functions are associated with demands and interests. Through such materials, students can not

only improve their language skills but also better understand technical language in a multicultural environment.

In order to emphasize our argument, we can truly agree with the opinion of Jaramillo (2022:10)¹ of that consider:

“It is critical to the design of the tasks to empathize with students, especially when they are expected to communicate in speaking. Research has shown that speaking inherently brings about higher levels of anxiety for students (C.-M. Chen & Lee, 2011; M. R. A Chen & Hwang, 2020); thus, a proactive action to minimize it would likely help students focus on using the language for communication. Understanding that leaning a language is a context and situated process mediated by the learner can guide the design to keep the affective, language and communicative needs at the center of the task-based learning process [-..] Finally, at the learner, task and technology interaction, it is important to consider how learners will access the technology, how they will likely interpret the tasks and what skills besides language they will need to address the demands of the tasks. This interaction should reflect the change that is intended for technology to offer ways to transform learning (Kenning, 2007; Laurillard, 2008) and language learning in particular with the appropriate support. In this interaction stage, learners' language level, types of tasks and technology affordances converge leading to increased but more complex opportunities for interlanguage development. In a communicative approach, students are expected to interact and communicate with others and use the language they are learning inside and outside the classroom”.

Another effective strategy is **collaborative learning**. Working in teams or pairs to solve a technical problem in Spanish not only encourages language use and interaction among students, but also contributes to the development of skills for professional and social life. In this environment, mistakes are common, but they are accepted as part of the process, not a failure. This is key to avoiding disenchantment with learning.

Finally, the motivation of technical students to learn Spanish grows exponentially when the language becomes a tool that allows them to confront real-world problems in their future profession. By combining a task-based approach with the use of active and contextual strategies, a dynamic learning environment is created, where the language ceases to be the end goal and becomes a vehicle for achieving concrete, intrinsic goals.

As pointed out by Ancenico y Otondo (2019)² the implications of motivation for students during their learning process have prompted studies using different methodologies and approaches.

Motivation has played an important role in student learning, as explained by Vale, Gonzalez, Rodriguez and Suarez who examined the reasons, self-essentials and inspirations among the students in the university of A Coruña within the Spanish academic reference³. His study compared students with high and low academic performance and found that people with high achievement levels demonstrated more internal and external inspiration. These students credited their success for personal efforts and ability: unlike their lower performance colleagues.

Personally, I share the opinion of the authors cited above, who argue that the relationship between motivation and learning also depends on the students' learning style. Having reached the final point of our paper, I would like to conclude by saying that learning takes place, however, in a social context that contributes to the attribution of other meanings to it. Therefore,

¹ *Leveraging asynchronous speaking tasks to promote willingness and confidence to speak in Spanish: A qualitative study*, in Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 2021.

² *Motivación para el aprendizaje del estudiantado técnico- universitario*, en „Revista ESPACIOS" vol. 40, nr. 33,2019, <http://www.revistaespacios.com/a19v40n33/a19.40m33p07.pdf>

³ op.cit. apud Ancenico y Otondo

the effort to learn can be more or less interesting depending on the functional meaning of what is learned.

The goal is to learn something useful although usefulness is relative: understanding a principle, solving a problem, facilitating new learning, facilitating learning that allows access to different studies, to the professional world in general and to specific jobs in particular, etc. Overall, the points mentioned above can be encapsulated by quoting Alonso Tapia (2005:4)⁴, whose opinion is as follows:

“Cómo influye en la motivación el significado de la actividad?”

Las actividades académicas tienen siempre más de un significado puesto que, como veremos, contribuyen a la consecución de diferentes metas. Sin embargo, no todas las metas tienen la misma importancia para cada uno de los alumnos. Esta importancia varía tanto en función de la orientación personal de éstos como de las distintas situaciones que afrontan a lo largo de su vida académica. Por este motivo, teniendo en cuenta que las distintas metas a menudo tienen efectos opuestos sobre el esfuerzo con que los alumnos afrontan el aprendizaje, parece importante conocer cuáles son tales efectos para así saber sobre qué metas tratar de influir y cómo hacerlo”.

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⁴ *Motivación para el aprendizaje: La perspectiva de los alumnos*. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia pp. 4-9. [\(Pdf\) Motivación Para El Aprendizaje: La Perspectiva De Los Alumnos](#)