

Report: Needs Analysis of the Iberika Language School

Iberika is a language school which specializes in teaching Spanish. Alongside Spanish, German, English, Portuguese, French and Dutch are taught. The school also offers a variety of course options:

- Intensive courses (30 lessons a week at 45 minutes each)
- Evening courses (2 lessons a week at 45 minutes each)
- Private lessons (flexible lesson package)

The ages and social backgrounds of the students in our Spanish classes are rather heterogenous but generally speaking we can divide our students into the following groups:

- The majority of our Spanish students are working adults. These students mainly attend intensive courses over a period of one or two weeks. Many of these students book these courses as educational leave, i.e., the course is seen as continued development of their required professional competencies. Others attend evening courses after work once a week.
- The second largest group is university students. These students generally attend Spanish language classes parallel to their other studies. Students attend evening classes and intensive classes in equal numbers.
- The third largest group is made up of senior citizens. These students attend evening courses primarily but also attend intensive courses sporadically.
- In addition, unemployed adults occasionally attend our intensive courses. These course are considered relevant continued education and are paid for by the Jobcenter (unemployment agency).
- Finally, our smallest group of customers consists of school children. These students often attend private tutor lessons in order to improve their Spanish for school.

The proceeding is a list of the motivations our students have for learning Spanish:

Private interest or as a hobby, for example:

- Travel to Spain or Latin America
- To communicate with people from all over the world as Spanish is currently an important and widely spoken language
- Because their partner is from a Spanish speaking country
- Personal interest in Spanish language culture (literature, music, film etc)

Professional interest, for example:

- For an internship or voluntary service in Latin America
- For an internship or a semester abroad in Spain
- For a position abroad in either Spain or Latin America
- Required foreign language knowledge for work
- To get a Spanish competency certificate-necessary for a job or university application or for school

Analysis of the Requirements for our Language School

The fact that the majority of our students register for our Spanish courses on their own accord and attend classes in their free time after work or school implies an already existent high level of motivation on the part of our students to learn Spanish. Although the students enter our courses highly motivated, they will still encounter highs and lows throughout the learning process. Learning is a living process during which motivation must be continually renewed through work, progress and new challenges.

The biggest problem that our students face, one of the main factors in their demotivation, is the fact that the students are unable to spend as much time practicing Spanish outside of the classroom as they would like to. Namely, the students do not live in a Spanish speaking country where they would be confronted by the language in their free time.

- **Evening Courses**

The students in our evening courses are especially affected by this problem. They have only 90 minutes of class every week. The amount of time they spend in a Spanish speaking environment is very small and, accordingly, they learn slowly. Many who wish to have more contact with Spanish would gladly participate in a language exchange, watch more Spanish films, or undertake a variety of other activities that would bring them in greater contact with the language. However, students often fail to follow through with the above mentioned options because they are unable to find appropriate groups that would enable them to take part in such activities. Other students simply lack the time due to other work and free time commitments.

- **Intensive Courses**

In intensive courses the students have 6 lessons, of 45 minutes each, every day. As each week the course completes a new sub level (e.g., A1.1 or B2.0), the students must study very intensely during the course. Along with the work in the classroom the students are assigned homework daily so that they can practice and strengthen the subject matter from class, e.g., grammar, structure, vocabulary, etc. Because of the brevity of the class and the large volume of learning material many of the students are unable to learn the material enduringly. They need more speaking practice and exposure to the language.

It would be counterproductive to give these students more conventional exercises and homework as it would only overburden them and lead to frustration. The ideal solution would be to offer the students the possibility to take part in other Spanish language activities outside of the classroom in a relaxed and fun environment where they could practice speaking Spanish with other Spanish students and native speakers.

We are convinced that the ESEDI project constitutes an excellent addition to our Spanish lessons. The collective work on bilingual theater pieces, the creative and multilingual discussion groups, the collaborative work despite various language capabilities, and the fun and diverse activities are perfectly suited for the students in our evening classes as well as for our intensive courses. ESEDI affords the students

the everyday practice that they otherwise lack. While in contact with a Spanish speaking environment the students will be exposed to new challenges that they will have to contend with. And, without ever realizing it, they will improve their Spanish.

Evaluation of the Results of the Needs Analysis

In May and June 2011, we carried out a Needs Analysis survey with our Spanish teachers and students according to the scope of the ESEDI project. For this purpose all the project partners created appropriate questionnaires. The goal of this inquiry is to define the lesson elements that advocate and inhibit students' motivation. We asked seven of our language teachers and 23 of our students. The following are the results of our survey.

- Needs Analysis of the Students

All 23 of the students questioned are adults who took part in a Spanish course of their own accord. They are between the ages of 19 and 68. The majority attended evening courses (2 lessons per week), only four of the students attended an intensive course (30 lessons per week). As a reason for participating in a Spanish course the students gave the following answers (the first answer was the most given answer):

- Private interest / hobby
- Communication in Spanish
- Professional reasons
- Desire to get to know Spanish language culture better

11. Do you feel unproductive during Spanish classes?

YES	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NO
(2)	(3)	(9)	(9)

12. Do you feel bored during Spanish classes?

YES	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NO
(0)	(1)	(4)	(18)

Interpretation: The results confirm our assumption that our customers come to the classes of their own accord and so take part in the classes with a high level of their own motivation. Students gave exhaustion after work or boring themes in the textbooks as reasons for occasional problems with motivation.

8. Do these aspects influence your motivation in class?

(The answers have been sorted by relevance to the students - the most important first)

1. You feel comfortable and accepted
2. Easy and relaxed atmosphere
3. Feeling of progress or improvement in your own competency
4. The course level is appropriate for you

5. You understand the use and purpose of the activities
6. Interaction with other students
7. You are involved in the activities
8. Possibility of choosing central topics, according to your taste and needs
9. Competitiveness with the fellow students

Interpretation: According to these results the students find a classroom environment where they feel comfortable to be immensely important. A relaxed atmosphere affords the students more confidence and is conducive to freer communication and unrestrained development of the students language knowledge and capabilities. All of these aspects were observed in a ESEDI theater course.

9. In the process of learning Spanish, the acquisition of which of these basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) is the most difficult for you? (Starting with the most difficult and moving to the easiest)
 - Speaking (15 from 23 students)
 - Listening (4 from 23 students)
 - Writing (2 from 23 students)
 - Reading

Interpretation: In the answers from this question speaking is, most strikingly, the most difficult language skill. Even the students who chose listening or writing as the most difficult skill chose speaking as the second most difficult skill. These results confirmed our assumption that the students do not receive enough speaking practice in a regular group class alone.

13. What kind of exercises do you prefer for developing desired skills? (e.g., filling in gaps, dialogues, role playing, short presentations, writing essays, listening to texts and songs, etc.)

8 students	dialogues, role playing, writing texts
8 students	did not answer at all
3 students	writing texts and essays
3 students	listening texts and songs, grammar, partner exercises
1 student	reading

Interpretation: The fact that one-third of the students questioned answered with dialogues, role playing and writing texts suggests that our students are aware of how important creative speaking and writing are for their language development. Clearly, these creative activities are also especially fun for the students. However, it must also be noted that another third of the students asked had no idea how they could improve their knowledge of the language. From these results it is clear that the students are in need of external help and inspiration to broaden and improve their retention of the language.

14. Is there enough information within the Spanish course about the culture and customs in Spanish speaking countries?

YES	16 students
No	5 students

Interpretation: Our courses contain much cultural material so the majority of students are satisfied with the amount. A few students wish even more expansive information about Spanish culture. An intercultural theater course would achieve this.

15. Are you interested in joining a course in Spanish, using theater for the purposes of language learning?

YES	9 students
NO	12 students

Interpretation: Although our students do not have much time outside of work to take part in Spanish courses, a surprisingly large amount of students expressed interest in taking part in a theater course. We hope that these students are still interested in participating in our theater course in 2012.

- Needs Analysis of the Teachers

All seven of the Spanish teachers questioned are native Spanish speakers that have been living in Berlin for several years. They are predominantly young (between the ages of 25 and 35) and have received a university education. The majority work as free lance teachers for multiple language schools. Only two of the seven teachers questioned have had previous experience with theater; they took part in school theater as children. As of yet none of the teachers have incorporated theater into their lessons.

2. Do these aspects influence the motivation of students in class?
(The most important come first)

1. The course level is appropriate for the student
2. Feeling of progress or improvement in one's own competency
3. Easy and relaxed atmosphere
4. The student feel comfortable and accepted
5. Direct student participation
6. Student involvement in the activity
7. Interaction amongst the students
8. The activities catch the student's interest
9. The student understands the use and purpose of the activities
10. Possibility of choosing central topics, according to tastes and needs
11. Competitiveness with the fellow students

Interpretation: The preceding questions were put to both the students and the teachers. While the students found a relaxed atmosphere the most important, the teachers found appropriate level placement and grouping to be most important. The biggest problem that teachers experience in the classroom is coping with inflexible

course material combined with variable levels of previous knowledge of the language. The ESEDI theater course would be ideal for working with heterogeneous groups as discrepant levels of knowledge wouldn't hinder the students ability to work cooperatively. Everyone is able to work creatively at his or her own level, and everyone is still able to learn from each other.

4. Can you indicate some of the most common aspects which, in your opinion, lead to loss of student motivation?

- *The didactic material doesn't conform to the interests of the students*
- *Poor classification of the students previous knowledge / false class level*
- *Boring themes and arrangement of exercises*
- *The teacher is too slow or too fast*
- *Poor classification of the students previous knowledge / false class level*
- *Too much grammar and too few practical exercises*
- *Boring themes*
- *Focus on grammatically correct use of the language and not enough focus on communication in and of itself*
- *Poor classification of the students previous knowledge / false class level*
- *Pace of the class is too slow*
- *Not enough variety in the lesson*

Interpretation: As previously determined in question 2 teachers find appropriate level placement and grouping to be incredibly important. This question further confirms the findings in question 2. The second most important point for loss of motivation, as listed above, would be resolved in a theater course. Teachers often complain that much of the didactic material is old fashioned or boring. Because of this they try to supplement the lesson with material and exercises that they developed themselves. But this requires much work and time on the part of the teacher. The ESEDI theater course would be an ideal way to overcome this set of problems; the students would work together with the teacher to develop creative activities, e.g, stories, text and staging for theater pieces.

5. Do you use these didactic tools or techniques in your classes?

	never	rarely	sometimes	frequently
Structure exercises and vocabulary	-	-	4	3
Listening exercises	-	-	3	4
Songs	1	4	2	-
Board games	-	2	3	2
Role playing or drama activities	-	1	5	1
Oral presentations	-	2	4	1
Discussions and debates	-	-	3	5

	never	rarely	sometimes	frequently
Individual production of texts	-	1	5	1
Creating stories in a group	1	3	3	1
Films, documentaries or adverts	1	3	2	1
Tests to asses the level	1	4	2	1
Reading short texts with a currents and cultural subject matter	-	1	3	3
Reading newspapers, novels or comics	1	2	3	1

Interpretation: It is clear from this list that the teachers use a wide range of techniques to improve the students basic language skills - speaking, hearing, writing and reading. Grammar exercises are supplemented with creative activities, for example with debates or text composition and presentations. Some of the teachers incorporated role playing activities into their lessons. Unfortunately, the shortness of the evening classes makes it difficult to include such time intensive activities. The fact that several of our teachers are already familiar with role play leads us to believe that they would also be interested in ESEDI theater courses.

8. According to the experience of your courses, do specific problems belong to each level? If yes, what would these problems be?

- A1 Assimilation of gender and number, use of articles, irregular verbs in the present tense, lack of vocabulary
- A2 Past tense forms
- B1 Past tense forms, Present Subjunctive, reduction of complicated sentences, Subjunctive Mood, construction of complicated clauses
- B2 Execution of Subjunctive, "fossil mistakes" (persistent problems)
- C1 literal translation of complicated sentence construction, construction of complicated clauses, demotivation due to slow level of progress
- C2 "fossil mistakes" (persistent problems), demotivation due to slow level of progress

Interpretation: We are convinced that a theater course, with an informal atmosphere, would be particularly affective in helping students of all levels to overcome "fossil mistakes" (persistent problems). The collective work of native speakers and students of various levels and the writing and memorizing of theater scripts would help students to train verb tenses and grammar intensely.

10. In the case of applying role playing or drama activities in your classes, what aspects of these games contribute to increasing student motivation?

Theatre is fun

The students can create the stories themselves

The students feel more comfortable with the language afterwards

*In small groups they feel less insecure and inhibited
They are engaged in the activity
Theater, in an informal setting, demands improvisation
The students can play with their imagination and fantasy*

What barriers or handicaps might be confronted with when it comes to putting them into practice?

*Shyness of some students, one should never pressure a student
The students don't understand the meaning or purpose of the role playing
The theme doesn't appeal to the students, they don't know what they should say or how they should react*

Interpretation: Our teachers, clearly, assume that role play and theater have many advantages for students. In an informal and relaxed environment such activities can improve everyone's self confidence. However, one should always bear in mind that shy students, who have a fear of performing, should not be forced into participating. A friendly and easy going environment is very important in encouraging shy students.

11. If you have applied theater as a didactic technique, can you evaluate it went?

I once did Japanese paper theater (Kamishibai) with the children. At first, they had to write texts, this advocates written articulation. And, the subsequent rehearsals and performances promotes the improvement of pronunciation.

I have used role playing activities in my lessons. It was a positive experience for everyone in the group. They had lots of fun and worked well with each other.

Role playing is a dynamic activity that allows plenty of latitude. While taking part in such activities you can learn a lot without feeling like you're in a lesson.

Interpretation: The majority of our teachers don't have any experience in the theater but they are ready and motivated to educate themselves further on the topic either on their own or through specific training.

Summary of our Needs Analysis

This inquiry has extensively confirmed all of our assumptions. Our customers are highly motivated, relatively speaking, but have little time for language lessons. Their biggest shortcomings are in their abilities to speak the language. Finally, their greatest wish in the classroom is an informal and comfortable learning atmosphere, where they can work on improving their communication skills in a creative way.

A theater course, without an overriding learning goal, made up of learners of various levels and native speakers presents an ideal way for us to supplement our normal group courses.

The language teachers suffer when they are forced to implement a strictly regimented curriculum to students with varying competencies. A theater course would make it possible for students with a wide range of capabilities to work together.

The teachers have an obvious interest in theater as a lesson technique and expect such exercises to provide a creative and supportive learning environment.

We are convinced that theater in the Spanish lessons at our school would be an excellent addition to our classes for both the students and teacher alike.