



UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO

DIVISIÓN DE HUMANIDADES Y LENGUAS

The Influence of Transition from High School to University on First-Year EFL University Students: Success and Failure attributions

Tesis

Para obtener el grado de
Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa

PRESENTA
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Cozumel, Quintana Roo, México, junio 2021



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*I dedicate this thesis to my family; in particular to my younger brother,
who is about to experience the university transition.*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to describe the influence of causal attributions of first-year English language learners on their achievement and expectations of success that emerged from their transition from high school to university.

Seventeen respondents from the second semester of the major *Lengua Inglesa* in the University of Quintana Roo were interviewed with open-ended questions based on a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The interviews were based on categories from the literature regarding students' English language learning achievement and their beliefs and opinions concerning the influence of the elements of the university transition (two stages of transition and four unfamiliar conditions) as well as the casual attributions of success and failure and expectations of success that emerged from the English class they attended during their first semester.

Results show diverse perceptions and beliefs concerning the two stages of the transition (before and after enrolling). Also, results provide information concerning unfamiliar conditions (e.g., external and internal pressure to excel) and attributions of success and failure towards English language achievement, such as *not delivering assignments* and *the final exam*.

This study shows that the academic and social elements found during the transition from high school to university can influence negatively or positively the language learning achievement of first-year English students, as well as their learning performance since the attributions of success and failure were linked to most of the categories presented in this study.

Key words: attributions, transition, university, first-year, achievement

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem

For a student, enrolling a university is a synonym for novel experiences. It is believed that becoming a university student is an academic challenge since it could lead to complex and stressful circumstances, which could bring either positive or negative consequences (Silva, 2011). Being a first-year student might mean to face pressure and doubt. However, each student reacts in a different way and the university experience becomes a personal journey. In general, university transition influence could be a major problem for students' persistence (Rovira, 2001) in a way that it might even hinder their development. Silva (2011) notes that this transition causes anxiety, insecurity and issues on the students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the transition from high school to university has been presented as one significant reason for students' desertion.

According to a study on higher education in Latin America and Caribbean countries (Ferreira, Avitabile, Botero, Haimovich, and Urzúa, 2017), half of 25 to 29-year-old population that studied at a university did not complete their studies and 50% of them dropped out from their programs in the first year. At the University of Quintana Roo, Cozumel campus, approximately 66% of the students enrolled in the *Lengua Inglesa* major (*curricula* 1995 and 2015) decided to suspend their studies temporarily or quit studying permanently and almost half of the students that dropped out were freshmen (Sistema de Administración Escolar, 2019). This evidence suggests that the transition from high school to university should be a relevant aspect at the University of Quintana Roo not only for desertion on first-year students (Tinto, 1989), but for the influence of transition on students' academic achievement (Perry, 2003).

1.2 Rationale

Exploring students' perceptions regarding their first-year university experiences is a topic that should receive more attention in the Mexican educational context, especially among freshmen students. Therefore, this thesis delves into University of Quintana Roo students' explanations about transition and their successful or failing process of English language learning.

As previously mentioned, the transition from high school to university can be one of the main reasons why first-year students' achievement is unsatisfactory (Silva, 2011); hence, exploring their perspectives and beliefs could provide an accurate view about learners' academic achievement and performance. Consequently, this thesis makes an attempt to explore first-year students' attributions so they could explain why they succeeded or failed the first level of English at the University of Quintana Roo.

According to the gathered data from the SAE (Sistema de Administración Escolar) portal of the University of Quintana Roo, students' final grades of *Inglés 1* (the starting English course) from the *Lengua Inglesa* major, during the Fall Course in 2018, were not satisfactory. Among a total of 61 students from this course, 47 passed and 14 failed. Also, and according to their low grades, 16 out of the 47 passing students were considered as failure prone. It can be said then that the academic achievement of almost half of the students was poor. Furthermore, 2 out of the 61 students dropped out. For this reason, the findings of this study might contribute to better understand why students fail and succeed during their transitions (since attributions provide causes for both failure and success) as well as it might help students, teachers and academic administrators to prevent desertion and low English learning performance by developing higher quality pedagogical strategies in order to ensure persistence and success in the first year of university studies.

1.3 General objective

This research study aims to describe the influence of causal attributions of first-year English language learners on their achievement and expectations of success that emerged from their transition from high school to university.

1.4 Research questions

- Research question 1: What are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning?
- Research question 2: What are the first-year English language students' causal attributions of success or failure and expectations of success towards English language achievement?

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following chapter reviews the theoretical framework of the transition from high school to university as well as the attribution theory. Also, it summarizes previous research studies that include the aforementioned subjects as well as their incorporation in the English language learning field.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The following studies compile the theoretical framework of this thesis which is based on the theory concerning the transition from high school to university problem as well as the attribution theory and the causal attributions in English Language Learning (ELL).

2.1.1 Transition from high school to university

Silva (2011) suggests that the transition from high school to university is a key moment in which students are exposed to changes that test their abilities and potentials. Also, the new contexts or unfamiliar teaching methods found in a university compromise students' autonomy and responsibility (Pitarch and Esteve, 2011). Moreover, there is a constant interaction between students and personal, familiar, institutional, and social situations that are related to the students' exploration on professional fields (Figuera, Dorio, and Forner, 2003).

According to Tinto (1989), the transition from high school to university involves two main stages. First, there is the early process of admission to university in which students create their first impressions of the academic institution. These perspectives are molded by the material that universities provide in order to show how university life is or will be. Also, this is the stage in which students are in the process of selecting the universities they would enroll and collect information about the majors they might consider to choose. In addition, this is the stage in which learners

generate expectations of success and failure, commonly motivated by the academic settings (Nilsen, 2009; Camacho, Barquero, Mariscal and Merino, 2012; Steinmann, Bosch and Aiassa, 2013).

Second, the following stage occurs at the first semester, especially during the first six weeks. Tinto (1989) also states that it is here when students may struggle with the new settings and people that could cause them problems to adapt. In this sense, it is suggested that one of the most complex and challenging parts of the transition to university is the adaptation process of students to the new social and academic environment (Gallardo, Lorca, Morrás, and Vergara, 2014).

Additionally, students experience the new academic settings also known as unfamiliar learning conditions (Haynes et al., 2009), which can negatively affect achievement, motivation, goal striving and persistence. In addition, the unfamiliar and unpredictable conditions faced during the first year of university include an increased pressure to excel, unfamiliar learning tasks, ineffective instruction, stringent grading practices, critical career choices, and new social networks (Perry, 2003). These academic and social elements, including the process of transition immersed in the two stages proposed by Tinto (1989), are crucial for students' university transition since they might influence their performance and learning achievement.

2.1.2 Attribution theory

The term *attribution* is defined by Harvey and Martinko (2009) as a causal explanation for an event or behavior. According to Manusov and Spitzberg (2008), attribution is the internal and external process in which we provide an explanation for our or other's behaviors. Additionally, Kelley and Michela (1980) note that causal attributions describe the factors that lead a person to attribute an event to one cause. Furthermore, attributions are generally described as the result of an interaction between an actor and an environment (Kelley and Michela, 1980).

Attribution theory originates from Rotter's (1966) and Heider's (1958) work, and it has been widely explored by Weiner on the educational field (Gabillon, 2013). In this respect, research about attribution has been done based on the work of some important representatives such as Fritz Heider who is called the founder of the attribution theory (Malle, 2011). At the same time, Heider's

work explored people's beliefs as they are connected to human behavior (Gabillon, 2013) and suggested that attributions are involved in *personal perceptions* more than on *objects* (Malle, 2011).

Bernard Weiner has also done extensive research about attribution. In general, his work (see Weiner, 2012) describes individuals' experiences and the causes of success and failure on academic settings (Haynes, Perry, Stupnisky, and Daniels, 2009), as his work about attribution theory explains people's need to find or create reasons why an outcome occurs (Mori, Gobel, Thepsiri and Pojanapunya, 2010).

Weiner (1992) explains that attributions of success and failure affect people's emotional reactions and success expectations; hence, influencing their motivation and future academic achievement. In addition, Manusov and Spitzberg (2008) state that attributions are "[...] concerned with the "how" and the "what" by which people process information in attempting to understand events, judge those events, and act on those events" (p. 38). At the same time, Graham (1991) concludes that the attributional model incorporates the antecedents of the attributions, their dimensions or properties of causes, specific causes, and both affective and cognitive consequences of particular self-ascriptions. Finally, according to Haynes et al. (2009), Weiner's theory focuses on students' reaction on unexpected and negative academic outcomes commonly found in the first year of university. In this regard, the attribution theory is a valuable component in the study of the causes of success and failure found in academic contexts and, particularly, in crucial moments such as the transition from high school to university.

2.1.3 Attributions in English Language Learning (ELL)

Gabillon (2013) claims that Weiner's attribution theory aims to explore learners' stated beliefs about their English language learning. Therefore, the study of causal attributions in ELL concerns Weiner's (1979) model of causal dimensions which involves three dimensions of causality related to attributions of success and failure and their psychological causes and consequences towards language learning. These causal dimensions include: locus of control, stability and controllability, which classify attributions based on how stable or unstable, controllable or uncontrollable they are as well as their internal or external nature. First, the dimension of controllability identifies

controllable and uncontrollable causes. Second, the stability dimension reveals how the attributions change over time and how it affects people’s expectations. Finally, locus of control involves internal and external factors which are often related to negative emotions such as guilt and anger.

Table 1 shows five examples of causal attributions and how they are classified into the three dimensions. For instance, *effort*, one of the most common causal attributions (Garduño et al. 2016, Kumar and Bhalla, 2019; Soriano and Alonso, 2019), is an internal attribution that is unstable and controllable.

Table 1.
Dimensional Classification Scheme for Causal Attributions

| ATTRIBUTION | Dimension | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------------|
| | <i>Locus</i> | <i>Stability</i> | <i>Controllability</i> |
| Ability | Internal | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Effort | Internal | Unstable | Controllable |
| Strategy | Internal | Unstable | Controllable |
| Task difficulty | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |
| Teacher influence | External | Stable | Uncontrollable |

Adapted from Vispoel and Austin (1995), based on Weiner

In addition, causal attributions of success and failure and the dimensions of causality are linked to the concept of beliefs regarding learning English as a second language. In this thesis study, this concept is prominent since it is one of the foundations of the principal research objective, which is to explore learners’ beliefs. The concept of belief is described by Horwitz (1987) as the notions that learners conceive which are influenced by previous experiences and their own cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, students’ understanding about their own learning beliefs may have an effect on their current or future actions (Dörnyei, 2001). In this sense, attributions and causal dimensions are also linked to future expectations since causal attributions can predict expectancy shifts (Graham, 1991). In consequence, expectations are considered as a crucial element for learners’ future success (Weiner, 1985).

2.2 Previous research studies

The following section presents studies dedicated to the transition from high school to university, causal attributions, causal attributions in English language learning, and causal attributions found during the university transition.

2.2.1 University transition

Larose, Bernier and Tarabulsy (2005) offered insight about the stages of college transition and its influence on students' academic achievement. The aim was to examine the relation among attachment state of mind, students' learning dispositions, and academic achievement during the transition to university. Participants were 62 French-speaking Canadian students that were assessed during two stages of transition. The first stage was at the end of high school in which students were interviewed (using face-to-face semi-structured interviews) about their learning dispositions (emotional reactions and behaviors in learning situations). Then, in the second stage, participants were assessed through their first year at college using the Test of Reaction and Adaptation to College. As for the attachment state of mind, students were asked about the relationship with their parents and the results of this interview described three categories: autonomous, enmeshed-dismissing and preoccupied students. Findings suggested that autonomous students showed better learning dispositions throughout the transition to college. Furthermore, dismissing students had the lowest grades because of the poor quality of attention in class during the transition. Finally, preoccupied students experienced fear of failure in the first semester of college and felt uncomfortable paying less attention to their studies. Moreover, results indicated three main aspects regarding how perceptions of academic performance changed during the students' transition to college; first, students reported seeking less peer assistance at the end of the high school stage than during the first semester of college. Second, giving more priority to studies was more significant in college than in high school.

And third, students that were classified as enmeshed and preoccupied expressed a fear of failure during their transition to college.

Hicks and Heastie (2008) exposed the psychological influence that transition had on first-year college students. The aim of this study was to provide information about how students coped with stress, physical and psychological health issues. The authors designed a Self-rated health and Quality of Life questionnaire applied to 514 first-year on-campus and off-campus university students. The participants of the study were African-Americans between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. The results showed that there was a difference including stress, roommates and housing. Therefore, on-campus students were more stressed than the off-campus students. In addition, off-campus students reported experiencing psychological health issues; nevertheless, these students stated that they did not experience any physical problems. Finally, the findings revealed that students' behavior might have been influenced by the unfamiliar academic environment creating on them unwanted stress. Unfamiliar settings are seen as relevant when it comes to the transition to high school to university since they could influence first-year learners' academic development.

Gallardo, Lorca, Morrás and Vergara (2014) examined the experience of first-year students concerning their transition from high school to university. This qualitative study aimed to explore the students' perspectives of their transitions while they attended the admission program of a university in Chile. Participants were twelve students enrolled in one engineering and four majors from the Pontífica Universidad Católica de Chile. These participants were interviewed in groups in order to explore their entry trajectory experiences as well as their perspectives about challenges and difficulties found in their first year. Findings suggest four stages of university transition that were identified by the students themselves: enrollment stage, orientation stage, strangeness stage, and assessment and continuity stage. Overall, participants had positive expectations about enrolling the university and mixed expectations concerning their classmates' socioeconomic status. In this sense, the orientation stage was helpful and motivational for the students since the orientation they received involved academic assistance and testimonies from other students. Then, the strangeness stage was classified as stringent and challenging because participants claimed having difficulties to fit in to the new academic and social environment. Finally, the assessment and continuity stage showed how students changed through their first year in regard with their academic performance. In this stage, students could assess their learning achievement and claimed to have overcome initial challenges, especially thanks to their classmates and teachers. This study concludes that first-year

students' university experiences are essential to develop admission programs in order to assist students with their transitions.

Álvarez, López and Pérez (2015) conducted a descriptive research to study the conditions under which the transition process to the university of high school students takes place. A total of 884 students who were studying in the second year of high school participated in the study and who also had the intention of undertaking university studies (Gender: 43.6% men and 56.4% women; age range = 16 -22 years, mode = 17, sd = 0.735, \bar{x} = 17.11). These students carried out their studies in the different modalities offered in the baccalaureate stage: science and technology (63.5%), humanities and social sciences (31.6%) and arts (4.9%). The data in this study were obtained from two information gathering techniques: a questionnaire addressed to second year high school students who were interested in pursuing university studies; and a discussion group made up of key informant experts in the field of secondary education and higher education. The results were organized according to the following dimensions: high school training, supports received and information and guidance, and expectations towards university education. Regarding high school training, 74.1% indicated that they had sufficiently developed skills that would allow them to travel and adapt adequately to university studies. In this sense, they showed a good command of the new information and communication technologies (88.7%) and the ability to work independently (83.3%). However, other skills such as information search and management (37.8%) or planning and organization of study time (57.5%) were less developed. Students indicated they were concerned about acquiring some competences such as oral and written communication (60.3%), decision-making (59.7%), teamwork (55.5%), and adaptation to new contexts (51.4%) or critical and self-critical capacity (50.8%). As for supports received and information and guidance, students suggest they were not receiving the necessary information to access and adequately transition to university studies. The information that high school students had about higher education was mainly on the university programs (76.1%), scholarships and study support aids (41.9%) and the professional opportunities of the different studies university students (34.6%). To a lesser extent, they knew the university administrative procedures (enrollment, validations, etc.) (12.0%), or the organization and general functioning of the university (17.4%). About expectations towards university education, the reasons that led high school students to choose university studies were mainly professional issues (job opportunities offered by degrees) (80.4%) and personal preparation and training (skills and abilities to be successful in the program) (76.7%). To a lesser extent, they valued

other aspects such as the social prestige of the university degree (43.3%) or the economic income that the chosen career would provide them in the future (42.5%). The authors concluded that high school students have developed a series of competencies and skills that are considered basic and necessary to navigate and adapt to university education; also, secondary schools develop different activities so that students acquire different capacities and competences, mainly linked to communication, decision-making and teamwork; and from the perspective of university teaching experts, competencies are not worked on in secondary education, returning to the traditional academicism that has prevailed for years in pre-university education.

Ramírez (2013) presents an interpretive in nature research which was based on an ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews with students from the first semesters of different careers and with other institutional actors, surveys and analysis of local sources of information. It is complemented by the analysis of various databases. It is a work that seeks to understand the meaning and value expressed by what is "said" by informants in relation to their first experiences in higher education. The significance of those everyday events that make up the life worlds of young people and, more specifically, their world as students is explored. Although the importance of the youth dimension in higher education is not unknown, the center of the analysis is located in the experiences related to academic achievement. The study has a "progressive approach". Its purpose is to achieve an understanding of those elements that contribute to the transition of students to the new academic environment during the first cycles in higher education. The place chosen for the study was the Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Ecatepec. This work is based on ethnographic observations made between December 2005 and September 2006, and on 10 semi-structured interviews with students enrolled in the first three semesters of five of the eight bachelor's degrees offered. Five interviews were individual and five collective. In total 21 students participated. The results show that within the process of choosing an institution and bachelor's degree, students considered aspects such as proximity; an image of prestige and excellence; extensive facilities and beautiful gardens; educational offer; certainty of an almost certain income; recommendations of relatives and acquaintances; by elimination; and also due to a set of fortuitous circumstances in which "with the flow" students and families were shaping their choices. In the process of choosing a career, reasons such as pleasure; eliminating other options; to give continuity to the training of the baccalaureate; the perception of the labor market; the influences and evaluations of students' parents on the educational options; perceptions of academic demands; through a self-selection

process; and in many cases, also by chance. It is concluded that in the transition to higher education, students recognize that they have greater freedom, but also greater responsibilities. They see themselves in another stage of life, with new interests. There are important changes in the perception and use of time, as well as in the perception they have of themselves. They are dedicated to settling in the new environment. They notice this in the level of complexity shown by the contents of the subjects, the specialized languages of the careers, the usefulness of previous learning, the more active role that is required of them, the rhythm of academic work, styles and expectations of teachers, the methods on which the teaching-learning process rests and the difficulties they encounter in identifying the nature of academic work.

Nadelson, Semmelroth, Martínez, Featherstone, Fuhriman and Sell (2013) conducted a research to determine the influences on first-year students' choice to pursue additional education by attending a postsecondary institution and the relationship of their expectations to their first-year experience. The sample was drawn from the population of university students attending a metropolitan research university in the western United States. They had 351 participants in the sample that met the criteria of being a first-year student which they defined as students who had completed less than 24 credits, or were 18 years of age. Participants were about 42% male and 58% female, with 23% from rural communities, 51 % from suburban communities, and 26% from urban communities.^[1] To collect data, they developed a demographics survey to collect a range of participant characteristics including number of credits taken, age, ethnicity, location of home community, academic major, and parent/guardian educational ^[2]experience. A five-point Likert-type scale for assessment of first-year students' experiences and expectations using a combination of new items and adapting previously developed items from assessments referenced in the literature was conducted. Results revealed that about Academic Expectations and Influences participants on average responded on the positive side of neutral in their experience with three exceptions. Responses indicate that the participants were in agreement with the statements with regard to their experiences and expectations. The exceptions included students engaging in informal inquiries into what it would be like to study at the institution, perceptions of faculty concern for students, and the importance of the university's research mission. The students were neutral on seeking information about studying at the institution, but were below neutral in their instructors' concern for their achievement. About Influences and Personal Characteristics, the analysis revealed the average responses for the influence tended to be positive for intrinsic motivators such as career and learning

goals (with the exception of making more money), which were answered above neutral indicating that the participants tended to find these to be important influences. Extrinsic influences, such as parents and friends, were answered on average below neutral indicating that the students tended to find external motivators to be less important in their decision to attend the institution, with the exception of making more money. About Awareness and Influence of Institutional Programs the analysis showed significant positive correlations between awareness and influence for each of the listed programs, with the highest correlation for awareness occurring with influence of the same program. Students indicated that the more they knew about a program the greater the program influenced their decision to attend the university. Authors conclude that a number of personal characteristics are correlated with first-year students' college expectations and experience. Also, the analysis uncovered some nuanced variations in experiences and expectations, such as downward shifts in the importance of social interactions with age and ACT scores. The research exposed some interesting links between first-year students' personal characteristics and their expectations of university life, their experience at the university, the perceived influences on their decision to attend college, and to a lesser extent, their awareness and the corresponding influence of supportive university programs.

Zavala, Ortiz and Meléndez (2019) presented a quantitative part of a larger mixed research study concerning the teaching and learning of English in a higher education institution. The study was carried out in a higher education institution in the Mexican southeast where it is mandatory to study four levels of English. A total of 882 newly admitted and enrolled students in the 28 educational programs of a university participated in the sample. The students were selected in a non-probability convenience sampling. The study was carried out using a deductive method under a descriptive approach. The research instrument used was a questionnaire that consisted of three sections: 1) origin information with the purpose of knowing the characteristics of newly admitted university students; 2) 20 indicators (out of 70 in the original survey) on a Likert scale to know the students' appreciation regarding their English classes at the upper secondary level; and 3) a self-assessment table of their level of English and assessment of their expectations of learning English at the university. The most complete surveys were analyzed. The statistical analysis of the data was performed using the SPSS statistical package, version 21. The results indicate students' experiences learning English in high school influence their mostly low self-assessment of English and their high expectations of learning in college. The foregoing leads to stopping to re-evaluate the

methodology used in the teaching-learning of English at the upper secondary level. The researchers concluded that it is important to know previous experiences. The experiences of the newly admitted college students were both positive and negative. On the one hand, the respect for the English teacher and his professional preparation is notable, as well as the appreciation of the support received in the classroom. The language skills that are most strengthened were reading and writing. On the other hand, the classes are not entirely interesting for the students and listening and oral skills were evaluated at a lower level. This points to little interaction in the English language within the classroom.

Figuera and Torrado (2013) analyzed the evolution and results of a research conducted inside the Catalan university system, at the University of Barcelona. They also outline the latest research into the transition to university in two different disciplines in the social sciences: business administration and management, and teacher training. The results provide a contextualized view of the difficulties in the transition process and highlight the importance of academic adjustment in the first year of study. Finally, they underlined the need to review the measures used at universities to promote student retention, such as orientation activities. A longitudinal study of the 2010 cohort of students who accessed the new degrees of "Business Administration and Management" (BAM), and "Pedagogy" of the University of Barcelona was carried out. The total number of participants was BAM ($n = 1290$) and pedagogy ($n = 233$). The results obtained suggest a clear verification of the existence of two different microsystems in terms of the conception, organization and development of the teaching-learning process, variables that undoubtedly condition the adaptation process and facilitate or inhibit academic and academic integration of the possibilities of social interaction of the students. Thus, the conception of the teaching of the BAM and Pedagogy teachers differs in significant aspects such as: the teaching and tutoring model, the relationship with the student and the importance given to the classroom climate as a factor that favors integration and performance of student. They also conclude that this research allows us to affirm that the final trajectories are the product of an interaction over time of institutional factors and personal factors. The segmented analysis of the multidimensionality of the persistence phenomenon in two different organizational settings of the same university confirms the influence of the context in the interpretation of the academic transition in the first year of the degree.

Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, and Rogers (2013) conducted a qualitative exploratory study with a different approach to studying transition through involving students as researchers.

The aim was to investigate how students talked about their experiences of transition in university. Four undergraduate students (the co-authors of the paper) worked as researchers in the study. They were all second or third year Psychology students at the time. Nineteen first and second year undergraduate psychology students participated in focus groups and semi-structured interviews, conducted by the student researchers, to provide in-depth accounts of their transition experiences. Participants represented males and females; several ethnic groups; and mature and traditional-aged students. Recruitment was through a combination of opportunity and self-select sampling. The dataset was analyzed thematically. The flexibility and theoretical freedom offered by thematic analysis made it a suitable tool because we wanted a data-driven analysis, which would enable an open exploration of trends in the data. Findings showed that students held internal images about university, shaped through cultural experience, which were used to form expectations and interpret experiences. Social relationships were crucial, with the formation of groups facilitating adjustment in an unfamiliar environment. Students also described how negotiating transition contributed to personal changes. The research emphasizes the salience of sociocultural factors in transition, and the relationship between transition and identity. Additionally, the value of including students as researchers to provide authentic access to student voices is highlighted.

Torcomián (2015) reported the educational experiences of students from a psychology major during their first year in university and the relation with their studying process. The methodology used is described as qualitative ethnographic, an approach that allowed the author to analyze and understand individual and social interpretations. Participants were all of first-year students from the Facultad de Psicología de la UNC, which were observed and interviewed during their first year in university. Findings describe the academic and social experiences of the participants found during two moments: 1) during a leveling course and 2) the experience of rupture in the school career. First, the leveling course is described a two-week course in which students provide information about their academic backgrounds in order to introduce and level students to the basic academic environment. This short course is also designed to help students to adapt and establish future relations with their peers. In addition, this is stage in which students drop out due to, according to the students who stayed, not liking the institution or being confused about it. This leveling course showed diverse perceptions about the social and academic new environment of the school. Students expressed being curious but afraid. Also, participants believed they would encounter a more difficult and different way of learning since they maintained links with high school. Second, the

experience of rupture is exposed as the moment in which students discover the differences from high school to university life. In this sense, the experiences of participants concern adjusting to the unfamiliar academic characteristics of the institution. For example, some students believed that the amount of daily study was superior than the one they used to have in high school causing them difficulties to adapt to it. Also, the sense of academic autonomy was a significant result of the transition since participants were aware of their responsibility as university students. This study concludes that the university transition is a crucial moment for students' experiences and academic adjustment and that it is an important stage for students since it is here when students are influenced in order to be successful (or not) in their school careers.

Majumdar and Ray (2010) explored the general stressors as perceived by 150 first-year post-graduate students (Science/Social Sciences) of the University college of Science and Technology, University of Calcutta, slated to complete 1 year in the institution of Physical Sciences as well as Social Sciences in the different aspects of post-graduate education, covering the domains career related stress, interpersonal relationships, expectation from self and others, stress from emerging challenges and time management, as well as their coping strategies. The response schedule was administered to 180 willing participants. 150 questionnaires were filled up and returned (response rate of 83.33%), which were selected for the purpose of research and analysis. Data was collected invoking top-of-the-mind responses about the issues in question and was analyzed through content analysis involving inductive coding. Qualitative analysis revealed the major stressors in each area. Subjects reported being assailed by mostly psychological consequences of stress – such as tension, anxiety, worry, temper tantrums and hopelessness. Most subjects reported that Career related issues evoked a large number of responses from all the participants irrespective of gender or area of specialization. More than three-fourths of the scholars stated that career is a major source of stress for them and more than half of the respondents reported thoughts of career to occupy their thoughts and cause them tension and worry. About Expectation from self and others, more than one third of the respondents stated that they are affected by tension, anxiety and irritation as a result of problems in interpersonal relationships. The major coping strategy identified by the respondents was balance or compromise that is 'sacrificing' or 'giving up things that hamper relations with loved ones. As for Stress from emerging challenges, the respondents identified the transition from the relatively less demanding undergraduate level to the postgraduate level as the major stressor. About Time management, nearly all the respondents reported that they have problems in time management.

Also, nearly one fourth of the respondents reported that they have no time for co-curricular or leisure activities. Finally, no significant difference could be found between the response trends of the male and female respondents or between the response trends of the respondents from pure science and social science specialization for most of the categories and themes. The study shows important insights into the nature of stress faced by the university students and the ways they try to deal with the same. The trends seen are in many ways similar to the findings of research conducted across the globe that students face stress from academic pressure ('vast syllabus', 'lack of time to complete the syllabus' and 'frequent examinations'), career choice, competition, difficulty in time management and absence of adequate guidance from teachers.

2.2.1.1 Summary

These studies explored some of the academic and social effects of college transition on first-year university students. Larose, Bernier and Tarabulsy (2005) examined how transition impacted students' academic achievement, attachment state of mind, and students' learning dispositions. At the same time, Hicks and Heastie's (2008) research, the influence of transition had psychological repercussions on students. Then, Gallardo, Lorca, Morrás and Vergara (2014) described first-year students' experiences concerning four crucial stages of their transitions. Following this, Álvares, López and Pérez (2015) explored the transition process of first-year university students regarding their academic backgrounds, support received, and expectations towards university education. In this sense, Ramírez (2013) presented a study that aimed to explore students' perceptions about their first experiences in higher education, which were mostly based on their academic achievement. The author concludes that students recognized that they had more freedom, but also greater responsibilities. Next, the study of Nadelson et al. (2013) provided insight about the first-year learners' expectations, experiences and perceptions about their university studies and how they influence students in their decisions. Further, the results of the study by Zavala, Ortiz and Meléndez (2019) suggest that students' experiences learning English in high school influence their low-self assessment of English and high expectations about university. Moreover, the study by Figuera and Torrado (2013) explores the difficulties in the transition process highlighting the importance of

academic adjustment in the first year of study. Subsequently, Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, and Rogers (2013) explored students' opinions and beliefs concerning their experiences of transition in university. Findings indicated that students held internal images about university, derived from cultural experience, which, in consequence, formed expectations. Additionally, the authors highlight the importance of social relationships since they were crucial for students' adjustment in the unfamiliar environment of the university. Similarly, Torcomián (2015) reported the results of a study that aimed to explore the educational and academic experiences from first-year psychology students focusing on two moments of their transition: 1) during a leveling course and 2) the rupture in the school career. The first moment was described as crucial since this is where students create expectations about their university studies. Also, responders claimed being curious and afraid about the new environment of school. As for the second moment, the author concludes that students experience a rupture in their school careers when they discover the differences between high school and university life. In this regard, students tend to have difficulties to adjust once they take new academic responsibilities. Finally, Majumdar and Ray (2010) investigated the general stressors found during the first year in university, which were related to psychological consequences of stress (e.g., tension, anxiety, worry). Also, a major source of stress for students was the career and problems concerning time management.

2.2.2 Causal Attributions

Matos, Otero and Díaz (2017) explored attributions from secondary school students. Their study aimed to gather, by a stratified probability sampling, the causal attributions of success and failure of 221 high school students (men and women) in Santa Clara city, Cuba. Results show that effort was the most relevant attribution of success ($M=4.25$). Also, ability ($M=3.86$) and ease of the subject ($M=3.06$) were considered as important factors for students' success. In contrast, lack of effort ($M=3.57$) was considered as the main attribution of academic failure. Additionally, causal attributions were linked, in general, to motivation since students believed that their learning achievement were influenced by external or internal factors such as their teachers' bad teaching methods or lack of effort derived from a lack of knowledge. Furthermore, the differences in gender show that men

tended to attribute success to the ease of the subjects while women were more inclined to attribute their success to effort. The study concludes that most of the attributions influenced participants to be motivated to learn and that these causal attributions can help institutions to promote strategies in order to contribute to learners learning process.

Kumar and Bhalla (2019) investigated the influence of causal attributions on the self-regulated learning strategies among undergraduate students. The sample comprised 864 students studying in different government and private colleges and universities from all three regions of Punjab viz. Majha, Malwa and Doaba. Specifically, the sample included 285 (32.9%) students of 2nd semester, 272 (31.48%) students of 4th semester and 307 (35.5%) students of 6th semester from different UG programs: B.Sc, BCA, BBA and B. The instrument to assess the causal attributions for their achieved scores was “The Revised Causal Dimension Scale (CDS II)” and for assessing the motivation and learning strategies, the “Motivated Strategies for Learning Strategies Questionnaire (MSLQ)” which was adapted and validated in Indian situations by the investigator. In order to analyze the variance of various dimensions and total score of motivation and learning strategies of w.r.t, the obtained scores were subjected to one-way ANOVA and further, on getting significant F-ratios, Scheffe Post Hoc test has been applied in order to see which group differ significantly. Results show Eight Causal Dimensions of Causal Attribution such as Internal-Stable-Uncontrollable (I-S- UnC) (Ability), Internal-Unstable-Controllable (I-UnS-C) (Efforts), Internal-Stable-Controllable (I-S-C) (Study Habits), Internal-Unstable-Uncontrollable (I-UnS-UnC) (Mood), External-Unstable-Uncontrollable (E-UnS-UnC) (Luck), External-Stable-Uncontrollable (E-S-UnC) (Task Difficulty), External-Stable-Controllable (E-S-C) (Instructor’s Bias/Favoritism), External-Unstable-Controllable (E-UnS-C) (Teacher’s help). From the results it was found that internal, stable and controllable (i.e. study habits), internal, unstable and controllable (i.e. efforts) and internal, stable and uncontrollable (i.e. ability) showed significant influence on various dimensions of Motivation and Learning Strategies. The study concludes that internal, stable and controllable attributions (i.e. study habits) and external, unstable and controllable factors (i.e. teacher’s help) showed its influence on the academic self-regulation of the learner more than the external, unstable and uncontrollable attributions (i.e. luck).

2.2.2.1 Summary

The studies above analyzed causal attributions found in different academic contexts. First, Matos, Otero and Días (2017) conducted a study focused on secondary students' learning attributions. On the one hand, findings indicate that ability and ease of the subject were considered as the main causal attributions of success. On the other hand, the main attribution of failure was lack of effort. Also, the resulting causal attributions were related to motivation since responders learning achievement seemed to be influenced by motivational factors such as the teacher' bad teaching methods. Next, Kumar and Bhalla (2019) investigated the causal attributions on the self-regulated learning strategies among undergraduate students. Their findings show eight causal dimensions of causal attributions: uncontrollable (ability), internal-unstable-controllable (effort), internal-stable-controllable (study habits), internal-unstable-uncontrollable (mood), external-stable-uncontrollable (task difficulty), external-stable-controllable (instructor's bias/favoritism), external-unstable-controllable (teacher's help). In addition, it was found that attributions such as study habits, effort, and ability influenced various dimensions of motivation and learning strategies.

2.2.3 Causal Attributions in English language learning

Gabillon (2013) research examined French-speaking learners' beliefs concerning their English language learning. The study aimed to find out students' opinions about learning English, to examine student attributions, and to establish links between learner's attributions, self-referent beliefs, perceived value of English language learning, and the marks they obtained in English. Participants were eight male French learners of English who studied at a two-year university program. Semi-structured interviews based on Weiner's theory (1985) were applied in order to collect data. The interviews explored students' opinions focusing on whether they stated a like or dislike towards English language learning, and their expectancy of future success. Results indicated that three out of eight participants stated that they did not like English, two out of eight students said they liked English but had also a negative perspective of it, and the rest expressed positive feelings towards English language. Students 1, 2, and 3 attributed the causes of their dislike to their low perceived

L2 competence and a lack of ability to learn English. Students 4 and 5 had mixed feelings about English language. They both thought English was important, but they attributed their non-achievement to an external cause: their previous English learning. Students 6 and 7 attributed the causes of success to the *activities* in their English classes. Student 8 attributed his English interest to his strong liking of the language. As for expectancy of success, students who disliked the language had negative expectations. The ones who had mixed opinions were insecure about getting better grades. Finally, students 6, 7, and 8 had positive expectations.

Garduño, Reyes, Chuc and Portillo (2016) explored causal attributions on university students. The aim of the study was to identify the causal attributions of success, definitions of success and failure and self-appraisal beliefs of seven English language university students. Participants were students from the *Lengua Inglesa* major at the University of Quintana Roo. Data collection was carried out based on a semi-structured interview that was divided into three categories: a) self-appraisal of success and failure, b) students' attributions on ELL, and c) causal dimensions. First, results show that all students' definitions of success were related to their language skills development. In this particular study, participants were passing students so there were not attributions of failure; nevertheless, students conceptualized failure as a lack of effort, lack of aptitude, and a negative attitude towards learning English. Second, a total of nine attributions for success were found: aptitude, practice, effort, responsibility, interest in English language, planning, familiar support, the teacher, and the partners' English level. Also, four students attributed their success to the liking and interest of English. Finally, concerning causal dimensions, most of the attributions were classified as internal, unstable and uncontrollable.

Yavuz and Hol (2017) found relevant information about causal attributions of success and failure on EFL learners. A total of 204 students were selected from the School of Foreign Languages at Pamukkale University, in Turkey, in order to identify their causal attributions of success and failure towards their English learning. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, focused on causal attributions, were carried out in order to deeply explore students' beliefs. To analyze data, SPSS 20.0 was used and interview protocol as decoded using document analysis. Three research questions were designed to investigate in the study: 1) to what factors do the Turkish EFL learners attribute their failure in learning English as a foreign language? 2) to what factors do the Turkish EFL learners attribute their success in learning English as a foreign language? And 3) what is the role of gender and English level of the Turkish EFL learners on the attributions of success

and failure? Findings suggest, on the one hand, that most of the attributions of success were internal causes, such as English background, self-confidence, effort, teacher and ability. On the other hand, attributions of failure were related to not enough background in learning English (external/uncontrollable) and to not studying hard enough (internal/controllable), which is linked to effort. Also, teachers and difficult exams were exposed as attributions of failure. Finally, the analysis of the role of gender concerning attributions of success and failure indicate that female students tended to attribute success in learning English to more internal factors than male participants. Conclusions of this study showed that English learners attribute their success and failure to diverse internal and external causal attributions. Also, it was suggested that teachers play an important role in the EFL setting since they directly contribute to students learning by creating positive atmosphere in the classrooms.

Soriano and Alonso (2019) explored success and failure attributions from second language learning students. This study aimed to classify causal attributions from students with English levels A1 and B1. Participants were 407 native Spanish students from the Official School of Languages (OSL) which completed Attribution to Success and Failure Questionnaires (ASQ and AFQ). Findings of this study show significant differences between A1 and B1 students. On the one hand, A1 students perceived their success as dependent in some internal but unstable controllable variables (effort, strategy) and external variables (teacher influence, task difficulty, class atmosphere). On the other hand, B1 students' attributions of success were internal and external (ability, marks, class level, preparation, enjoyment within the classroom) whereas failure attributions were external factors (luck, teachers influence and task difficulty). This study provided evidence concerning attributions of success and failure on second language learning students which indicate diverse academic causes that may have educational implications for class teachers.

Genç (2016) carried out a study to analyze Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' attributions to success and failure and the effects of gender, age, and perceived success on their attributions. The participants in this research comprised 170 (58.4%) females and 121 (41.6%) males, totally 291 students of preparatory classes studying English for one year in the School of Foreign Languages. They were all freshmen aged from 18 to 30. The participants were asked to anonymously fill out a questionnaire involving two parts that respectively investigated their background information and a scale concerning questions attributions to their success and failure. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, median, and standard deviation),

Independent Samples T tests and Pearson Correlation Analysis. The level of significance was 0.05 for the analyses, which were conducted using SPSS. The results indicated that EFL learners respectively attributed interest, ability, task difficulty, effort, luck and the influence of teacher and school as influential factors of their success whereas they respectively rated effort, interest, the effect of teacher and school, ability, task difficulty, and luck as influential factors of their failure. Furthermore, they were more inclined to agree that internal reasons are responsible for their success while blaming external reasons for their failure. In addition, females seemed to attribute external factors more than males and unsuccessful learners attributed more importance to effort and internal dimension than successful students. Finally, it was revealed that age was not an important factor in EFL learners' attribution to success and failure. The study concludes that gender was found to be as a significant factor just in students' attribution to failure but not success. Regarding the perceived success of the EFL learners, unsuccessful learners seem to attribute more importance to effort and internal dimension than successful students in terms of their success.

Bouchaib, Ahmadou, and Abdelkader (2018) examined high school students' attributions of success in English language learning. They aimed to research factors contributing to success in foreign language learning of 113 students from three high schools in El Jadida, Morocco. In this sense, this study addressed three research questions: 1) to what factors do students attribute success in English language learning? 2) how different are the causal attributions between self-rated successful and self-rated unsuccessful students? 3) how does perceived success influence learners' attribution of time and effort in learning English? Further, this study was conducted using a questionnaire and a follow-up interview where participants identified the causes of success in their language learning and make a self-evaluation concerning their perceived success. Findings indicate that students tended to attribute success mostly to external factors like class atmosphere, task difficulty and teaching methods followed by internal factors such as ability, interest, effort and strategy. As for the self-evaluations of success, fifty-two participants rated themselves as low achievers and sixty-one perceived themselves as high achievers. Concerning the differences in causal attributions between successful and unsuccessful students, results indicate that the means for internal factors were higher for self-rated successful participants (4.09) than for the self-rated unsuccessful learners (3.09). However, the teacher influence and class atmosphere as causal attributions were quite close for both successful and unsuccessful students. In regard with the differences between self-rated successful and unsuccessful students with regard with effort and time, findings show that

successful students allocated more time to their language studies than unsuccessful students (4.30 versus 2.04).

Mali (2015) researched students' explanations and reasons for their English-speaking enhancement. Participants were 18 university students from the Sekolah Tinggi Pariwisata Ambarrukmo Yogyakarta (STIPRAM) that belonged to an English class. A questionnaire and an interview were used as instruments in order to explore students' attributions concerning their English-speaking enhancement which was divided by the researcher by three indicators, they are the students' ability [1] in doing a monologue using English actively in front of the class; [2] in asking their friends questions using English actively; and [3] answering the questions proposed by their friends using English actively. Findings of this study show that participants' attributions for their ability in doing a monologue using English actively were (in order of relevance): need or importance, positive motivation from friends, positive motivation from the teacher, self-confidence, rewards from the teacher and positive classroom environment. Then, the students' attributions for their ability in asking questions using English actively were (in order of relevance): need or importance, strategy, positive motivation from the teacher, self-confidence, positive motivation from friends, rewards from the teacher, interesting presentation by another student, having background knowledge to what their friends presented. Finally, the learners' attributions for their ability in answering questions by friends using English actively were (in order of relevance): need or importance, strategy, self-confidence, build positive environments, positive motivation from the teacher, having background knowledge to what their friends said, vocabulary mastery, clarity in the questions, rewards from the teacher, positive motivation from friends. The study concludes that primary attributions on their English-speaking enhancement involve doing particular English-speaking activities, positive relationships among classmates and the teacher. Also, the positive motivation derived from classmates and the teacher were relevant for students' language learning.

Mekonnen and Roba (2017) examined students' explanation of performance in learning English language at Adama town government high schools in Ethiopia to look into its pedagogical implications. The perceived reasons for success and failure of ability groups were investigated using cross-sectional study design. Three public secondary schools were purposively selected for some reasons: A) It was felt that the government schools were the more convenient setting for study because variables related to economic status would be controlled, as students who go to public schools are usually from a similar financial background in Ethiopian context. B) It is agreed

among the scholars that students at private schools have better academic performance than their counterparts at public schools. C) Students' achievement-related beliefs undergo a developmental change from elementary to secondary education and are most pronounced later. Based on the total number of grade nine students in the setting of the study (from the total population of 237), the required sample size for the study with 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level was 147 grade nine students. The data were gathered through testing and questionnaire from randomly selected sample population, that is, 147 grade nine students. Descriptive statistics, principal component analysis, mean, and T-test were carried out to find out the difference between high and low achievers' attribution of performance. High achievers and low achievers formed different attribution patterns of the success and failure of their performance in learning the targeted language. High achievers ascribed their success to effort and luck; whereas, low achievers attributed their performance to task simplicity, teacher's predisposition, availability of instructional materials, luck, and teacher's good behavior. From the finding of the study, teacher's awareness of the attributions of students to the success and failure of their performances has received the pedagogical implications.

2.2.3.1 Summary

These studies described students' attributions towards their English language achievements. Responders in Gabillon's (2013) research provided attributions for their like (activities in the English class, interest) or dislike (low perceived L2 competence, lack of ability to learn English, previous English learning) of the English language. The ones who disliked English had mixed expectations of success whereas the ones who said they liked English provided positive beliefs of future success. In the case of the study by Garduño et al (2016), attributions of success were: aptitude, practice, effort, responsibility, interest in English language, planning, familiar support, the teacher, and partners English level. In contrast, participants' attributions of failure were: lack of effort, lack of aptitude and negative attitude towards learning English. Next, Yavuz and Hol (2017) study presented EFL learners' causal attributions of success and failure. First, attributions of success were mostly internal such as English background, self-confidence, effort, teacher and ability. Second, attributions of failure varied in regard with their causal dimension description, that is, not enough

background in learning English (external) and not studying hard enough (internal). Similarly, the study by Soriano and Alonso (2019) gathered information concerning attributions of success and failure from students with A1 and B1 English levels. A1 students had only attributions of success (effort, strategy, teacher influence, task difficulty, class atmosphere) and B1 participants provided both success (ability, marks, class level, preparation, enjoyment within the classroom) and failure (luck, teachers influence and task difficulty) causal attributions. In addition, Genç (2016) examined Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' attributions of success and failure. Results show that both causal attributions of success and failure were related to interest, ability, task difficulty, effort, luck and the influence of teacher and school. However, responders claimed agree that internal reasons are responsible for their success while blaming external factors to their failure. Similar findings were presented by Bouchaib, Ahmadou and Abdelkader (2018) who investigated language learners' attributions of success. They conclude that students' success came mostly from external factors like class atmosphere, task difficulty and teaching methods. In contrast, internal factors were related to ability, interest, effort, and strategy. Further, Mali (2015) researched the explanations and reasons of English learners' speaking enhancement. The author concludes that the main attributions for responders' English-speaking enhancement are linked to doing particular English-speaking activities, positive relationships with classmates and the motivation of the teacher. Finally, Mekonnen and Roba (2017) provided results concerning high school students' performance explanations towards their learning. In this sense, Responders considered as high achievers attributed their success to effort and luck, whereas, low achievers ascribed their performance to task simplicity teacher's predisposition, availability of instructional materials, luck, and teacher's good behavior.

2.2.4 Causal attributions and university transition

Díaz, Castillo and Encinas (2011) examined first-year university students' explanations of failure. The aim of the study was to explore students' attributions of failure in order to understand their perspectives towards their learning achievement. Participants were 100 men and women university students who were studying the first and second semester of the subject *Desarrollo Personal*. A semantic network instrument was used where students had to provide five different words in order

to describe attributions for academic failure. Then, participants ranked the words from 1 (the most important) to 5 (the least important). The results showed 10 attributions of failure: irresponsibility, laziness, immaturity, defeat, sadness, unaccomplished, to fail, ignorance, and tardiness. In this study, irresponsibility and laziness were the most frequent attributions of failure. Finally, the relevance of this study lies on its evidence about first-year students' deficient academic performance which is one of the main consequences of the transition from high school to university.

Fernández, Arnaiz, Mejia and Barca (2015) explored causal attributions related to first-year university students' learning achievement. Their study aimed to analyze what attributions prevail among students and how these attributions occur among high and low achieving students. Participants were 787 first-year students from the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) in Dominican Republic. The instrument used was a Subscale EACM (Escala de Evaluación de Estilos atribucionales) which measured participants' causal attributions in relation with their academic results and learning achievement. Findings indicate that participants relate their academic success and failure to internal (ability, effort) and external (subjects, teachers, luck) causal attributions. Furthermore, it was found that external attributions, like teachers or luck, influenced negatively in the participants' motivation and achievement. In contrast, students who provided internal causal attributions are the ones with a higher learning achievement. This study contributes with the research of causal attributions that are found in the first year of university which, in this case, were seen in relation with students' high and low learning achievement.

Barros and Simão (2018) analyzed first-year university students' explanations of success. The purpose of the study was to identify learners' perceived attributions of academic success in the transition from high school to university. Two instruments were carried out in order to collect data: 1) a preliminary survey and 2) a survey containing the resulting data from the first instrument. For the preliminary instrument, a survey with open questions was administered to 184 first-year university students asking them to indicate which factors they thought were crucial for their academic success during their transition to university. Second, in the main study procedure, the resulting list from the preliminary survey was showed to 204 first-year students who rated the attributions from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). The findings showed that internal and controllable attributions were the most important factors for success. These attributions were: hard work, determination, persistence, self-regulation of learning, and commitment to academic goals. As for external and stable attributions, participants stated that family support, teachers, and environment

were the most important attributions for success. In contrast, students with lower achievement levels stated that their achievements depended on external and uncontrollable causes, like environment, teachers, faculty resources, and luck.

2.2.4.1 Summary

Briefly, studies for attribution and university transition provided insights on first-year university students and their perceptions about lower achievement levels, failure, and desertion. Díaz, Castillo and Encinas (2011) analyzed what pupils believed about failure during the first year of university and it seemed that not being responsible was the main factor that caused failure. These authors stated that the first year of the university had an effect on students that made them aware of a bigger responsibility and the cognitive abilities they had to achieve. Furthermore, Fernández, Arnaiz, Mejía and Barca (2015) explored causal attributions and their influence on first-year students' achievement. They conclude that external attributions were more likely to affect participants with low learning achievement and internal attributions were linked to students with higher achievement. Finally, Barros and Simão (2018) concluded that successful first-year students tend to attribute their achievements to internal and controllable causes, whereas students with lower academic results believed that external and uncontrollable attributions were the main causes. These studies suggest that internal or external attributions were given to explain failure and success. Also, these studies about causal attributions explained the diverse possibilities regarding the effects of transition to university.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

Creswell (2014) describes qualitative research as a study that aims to explore and understand what a group or individuals have to say about a social or human issue. At the same time, an exploratory research study focuses on exploring unknown areas or on specific problems and phenomena that need more understanding (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, a qualitative exploratory research seeks to analyze people's opinions and perceptions about an unexplored (or little explored) topic in order to listen to participants and build an understanding based on what is heard (Creswell, 2014). In this sense, this thesis was performed from a qualitative exploratory view since little research has been done on this context, which also concerns causal attributions immersed in the transition from high school to university.

Consequently, this thesis research is considered as qualitative exploratory since it analyzes the beliefs, perceptions and expectations of a small group of students regarding their attributions on transition from high school to university phenomenon, which had not been studied before in any university from Cozumel. In addition, data was gathered using open-ended interviews based on literature that were recorded and later transcribed for their better understanding. Interviews were used since qualitative exploratory research is generally carried out using recorded open-ended interviewing that is transcribed (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Participants

This study was conducted at the University of Quintana Roo, Cozumel campus. The University of Quintana Roo currently offers four majors (*Gestión de Servicios Turísticos, Manejo de Recursos Naturales, Lengua Inglesa, Mercadotecnia y Negocios*), one master's degree (*Maestría en Gestión*

Sustentable del Turismo), and one doctorate program (*Doctorado en Desarrollo Sostenible*). The present study focused only on first-year students enrolled in the *Lengua Inglesa* major because their final grades show that there were students who succeed and failed the English course they attended, which, at the same time, suggest that students learning achievement is unsatisfactory.

Participants were 21 on-campus university students, men and women, who had just finished the first course of the *Lengua Inglesa* major according to the 2015 program at the University of Quintana Roo, Cozumel campus. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 19. In addition, four of these students were chosen to perform a pilot interview and the rest (17) were involved in the official interviews.

The seventeen resulting participants were divided into three categories according to their final grades of the subject *Inglés 1*: 3 *failing students*: less than 7.0; 5 *average students*: from 7.0 to 7.9; and 9 *passing students* from 8.0 to 10. According to Perry et al. (2010), this classification displays groupings applied by teachers to estimate student progress and by educational institutions for administrative decisions. The three categories chosen for this study were used to develop a proper analysis and organization of participants' English language achievement.

Furthermore, participants were personally invited to participate in the study and be interviewed. They were selected using convenience sampling. In qualitative research participants for interviews are purposefully selected according to the researcher needs (Creswell, 2014). Also, Creswell notes that a convenience sample is used when respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability. According to Dörnyei (2007), the number of participants used on a qualitative research is typically less than a quantitative one because the qualitative research is described as labor-intensive. In regard to this study, participants were selected based on two main aspects: first, students must have enrolled the university immediately after finishing high-school; and second, participants must have been freshmen students, specifically students that already finished the first semester.

3.3 Instrument

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were carried out. Dörnyei (2007) states that, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewers have pre-prepared guiding questions that let them elaborate

on certain issues. Also, these questions were open-ended so participants could offer graphic examples or illustrative quotes that could guide the researcher to identify issues not previously considered (Dörnyei, 2007). The interview questionnaire designed for this study (see appendix A) was based on perceptions, experiences and attributions about the academic and social elements of the university transition on student's achievement in English learning at the University of Quintana Roo, Cozumel campus.

To refine the instrument, four students were chosen to pilot the interview. Participants belonged to the same list of students established for the purposes of this study; however, these students did not participate in the final interviews. Piloting is useful to improve research instruments and other aspects related to a final study such as assessing the feasibility of the study, refining the analysis plans or to identify logistical problems (Sampson, 2004; Yin, 2011; Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). Finally, the interview instrument used in the piloting stage was revisited and corrected by thesis supervisor, Mizael Garduño Buenfil in order to carry out a new instrument using the procedures described below.

3.4 Procedure

3.4.1 Background

Seventeen interviews were conducted on March 22, 2019 and ended on April 12, 2019. Before the interviews were conducted, participants were asked to sign a consent form (see appendix B) in order to obtain their permission for their contribution to this study as well as their authorization to use the information they provided. Furthermore, in order to obtain privacy, facilities from the University of Quintana Roo were used to carry out the interviews (an office of a professor, a workplace from the library Sara María Rivero Novelo in Cozumel, and the private classroom from the CEI: Centro de Enseñanza de Idiomas/Language Learning Center). These facilities were previously requested for their proper use. In addition, the interviews were conducted in Spanish for better comprehension and recorded with a digital recorder device. The interviews lasted approximately thirty

minutes each and were transcribed using the word processor Microsoft Word 2016 © for further coding and analysis.

As stated before, the interviews focused on first-year students' beliefs of success and failure based on Weiner theory (1985) and the academic and social elements known as unfamiliar conditions (Perry, 2003) as well as the transition factors that are immersed in the transition stages by Tinto (1989). Therefore, questions were formulated, from general to specific, based on particular matters related to students' academic backgrounds, explanations for their success or failure, transition stages experiences, and the academic influence of transition.

3.4.2 Interviews

The interviews started by asking the participants about their self-appraisal of success and failure (Haynes et al, 2009; Weiner, 2010). At the same time, participants were asked about their attributions regarding their final grades in the English course they enrolled. Also, the interviews included questions about participants' expectations of success.

Next, questions concerned Tinto's (1989) transition stages. According to Tinto (1989), first impressions of the institution about social and intellectual characteristics might mold students' perceptions of how the university life will be and eventually have an impact on their achievement and performance. Then, Tinto claims that there are two crucial stages for the transition process: 1) before enrolling the university (students select their majors and create expectations) and 2) the first encounter with the institution and the subsequent academic and social experiences. The next part of the interviews was based on those stages in which students were asked about their prior expectations and their experiences selecting *Lengua Inglesa* as their major. Then, participants were asked about their posterior enrollment expectations about the major and the university.

Finally, questions were oriented to the influence of unfamiliar conditions on the participants' English achievement. These elements were included in the instrument in order to identify additional causal attributions and to explore their influence on students' language learning achievement. The questions were based on the following categories labeled as unpredictable conditions that are found on the first year of university (Perry, 2003):

1. Increased pressure to excel (includes questions about the pressure to have success).
2. Ineffective instruction (includes questions about teachers' methodologies).
3. Stringent grading practices (includes questions about teachers' grading criteria).
4. New social networks (includes questions about classmates' influence).

3.5 Data analysis

Firstly, the information was analyzed based on a five-phase analysis model by Yin (2011) and the coding data analysis by Madison (2005). Yin (2011) suggests five features of the qualitative research: “1) a qualitative research studies the meaning of people’s life, under real world conditions; 2) represents the views and perspectives of the people in a study; 3) covers the contextual conditions within which people live; 4) contributes insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior; 5) and strives to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone” (pp. 7-8).

Transcribed interviews were analyzed in order to compile data, which was first classified into three main themes: attributions of success and failure, expectations of success and the elements of the university transition stages (major selection, expectations of the major and the university, unfamiliar conditions, emerging categories). According to Madison (2005), this step of the analysis concerns the grouping of the data; thus, each cluster was analyzed in order to label specific pieces of information as Yin (2011) suggests: “The second phase calls for breaking down the compiled data into smaller fragments or pieces, which may be considered a *Disassembling* procedure.” (p. 178).

Furthermore, the information was interpreted and analyzed in order to find differences and similarities and relevant information regarding the main topics which were contrasted among them, thereby developing tables in order to reassemble and interpret the information analyzed.

As shown in Figure 1, the coded data was organized and arranged in a chronological order based on the transition stages by Tinto (1989), the unfamiliar conditions by Perry (2003) (RQ1: “What are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning?”), and causal attributions

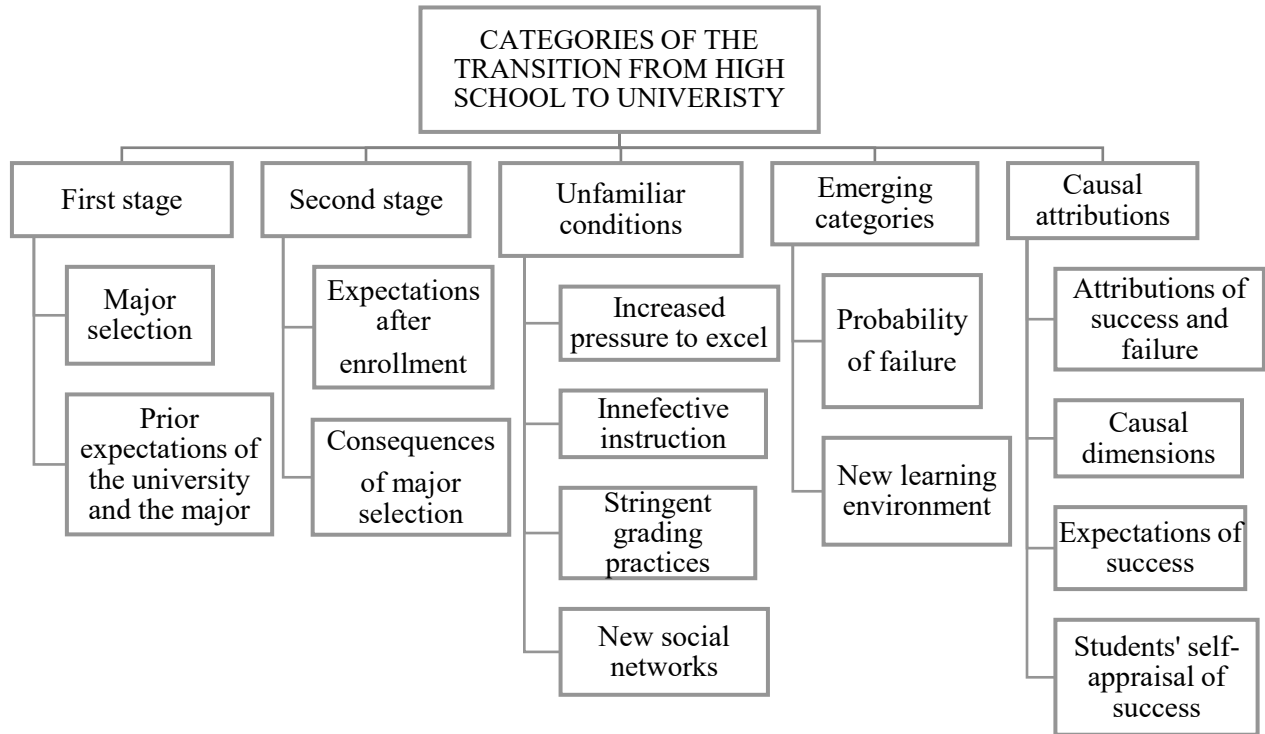
(RQ2: “What are the first-year English language students’ beliefs regarding the causes of success or failure and expectations towards English language achievement?”). Additionally, two novel categories were identified during the interviews: 1) probability of failure and 2) new learning environment. These categories are located after the first and second stage and the unfamiliar conditions.

Within RQ1, the first stage of the transition concerned the participants’ prior expectations of the university and the *Lengua Inglesa* major. Then, the second stage of the transition contains the following two categories: 1) expectations after enrollment and 2) consequences of major selection. Despite this last category was found listed on the unfamiliar conditions by Perry (2003), it was introduced in the first stage of the transition since Tinto (1989) concludes that this is the moment where students select their majors and make crucial decisions after and before enrolling. The next column concerns the unfamiliar conditions by Perry, (2003) which was developed according to the categories: increased pressure to excel, ineffective instruction, stringent grading practices, and new social networks.

As for RQ2, the following column concerns the attributions of success and failure and their classification regarding the three causal dimensions proposed by Weiner (1979): locus, stability and controllability. Additionally, this section provides the expectations of success by the participants and their self-appraisal evaluations of success.

Figure 1.

Categories of the transition from high school to university



Compiled by the author (2019) and based on Tinto (1989), Perry (2003) and Weiner (1979, 2010).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data extracted from the interviews. The two main stages proposed by Tinto (1989) and the unfamiliar conditions by Perry (2003) were used to classify the information in order to obtain a chronological analysis in which all resulting categories are immersed.

Findings indicate that participants experienced the first stage of the transition when they conceived expectations about how the university and the major would be like. In this sense, participants provided their opinions about their decision for selecting this major as well as their prior expectations of the university and the *Lengua Inglesa* major.

Then, the second stage concerns the experiences participants had once they enrolled. Here, participants provided perceptions about the university's quality and the curriculum of the major and how they changed.

In addition, this section presents the unfamiliar conditions that included an increased pressure to excel, more frequent failure, ineffective instruction, stringent grading practices, and the influence of classmates as new social networks.

Furthermore, the categories *Probability of failure* and *New learning environment* were classified as emerging categories since novel information was coded from the interviews. The *probability of failure* category shows how students perceived the likelihood of failing the course during their transitions and the *new learning environment* section presents participants' views of the new academic settings they encountered in which they sensed a new form of responsibility for learning English.

Finally, attributions for success and failure are presented, as well as their classification of causal dimensions. Results show diverse attributions such as *the teacher* and *not delivering assignments*. Also, internal, controllable, and unstable causal dimensions predominate among

attributions. In addition, results regarding students' expectations of success and self-appraisal of success are presented.

4.2 What are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning?

This section presents the results concerning the first and second stage of the transition from high school to university which involve participants' major selection decisions, prior expectations of the university and major, expectations after enrollment, and consequences of major selection. In addition, this section introduces students' beliefs regarding unfamiliar conditions (increased pressure to excel, ineffective instruction, stringent grading practices, new social networks) as well as two emerging categories (probability of failure, new learning environment). In this regard, findings provide the reasons (attributions) of participants' beliefs based on the resulting categories, which were part of their English language learning.

4.2.1 First stage of the transition

The following section describes the opinions that participants had concerning the University of Quintana Roo and the *Lengua Inglesa* major. These opinions emerged during the first stage of the transition which is considered in this study as the moment in which participants were introduced and familiarized to the university and the major just before they enrolled. In this sense, results about major selection are presented as well as prior expectations of the university and the major. Also, participants provide causes for their beliefs that are seen in this thesis as part of causal attributions associated with the transition from high school to university.

4.2.1.1 Major Selection

This section presents participants' previous decisions about selecting *Lengua Inglesa* as their definitive major. Also, the reasons for their decisions are displayed.

Findings indicate that, on the one hand, ten out of seventeen participants reported that *Lengua Inglesa* was their first option when they had to decide which major to study. On the other hand, seven participants (three average and four passing students) claimed that *Lengua Inglesa* was not their first choice. Additionally, results show four different reasons for selecting the major distributed among the ones who selected and did not select *Lengua Inglesa* as their first option. Finally, seven participants agreed that selecting the major was, in some way, beneficial for them, however, the rest of the participants reported negative opinions about the major.

4.2.1.1.1 *Lengua Inglesa* as a first choice

Three failing, two average, and five passing students asserted that they selected the major as their first choice. First, participants F1, F2, F3 and A2 agreed that they decided to enroll *Lengua Inglesa* since they believed that having certain knowledge in English could increase the possibilities to find a job: “[...] *A mí me llama la atención estudiar esta carrera porque primero que nada mi mayor motivación era aprender el inglés para poder tener más campo laboral porque en la mayor parte de los trabajos*” (F2).

Second, participants A6, P3, P5, P10, P12 and P13 selected *Lengua Inglesa* because they claimed that this major would be a good option to learn English and develop their language knowledge and abilities: “[...] *Desde que estaba muy pequeño me había llamado mucho la atención el aprender inglés, entonces mi idea era aprenderlo ya así los diferentes niveles para poder hablarlo o para poder leerlo, escribirlo, entre otras*” (P12).

4.2.1.1.2 Lengua Inglesa as a second choice

Three average (A1, A4, A5) and four passing students (P6, P11, P14, P15) claimed that they did not have *Lengua Inglesa* as their first choice. The reasons for selecting *Lengua Inglesa* as a second choice were: economic circumstances (not being able to pay for enrolling another university): “*No podía salir de la isla por causas económicas entonces esto [LENGUA INGLESA] fue lo más viable, lo más que me atraía por decirlo así*” (A5).

And not being accepted in other universities:

“*En el proceso de inscripción para la universidad perdí la convocatoria [...] no quedé y pues yo tenía contemplado no estudiar un año [...]. Entonces cuando vi aún quedaba oportunidad para entrar aquí, me escribí y fue la única carrera que me llamó la atención y por eso entré*” (P6).

4.2.1.2 Prior expectations about the university

Results indicate that 14 participant had positive and negative prior expectations about the university. Overall, one failing, three average, and three passing students had positive expectations about the university. Students’ positive expectations concerned the quality of the university’s major program, and adequate facilities: “*Muy hermosa la verdad. La verdad me gustó, me encantó, dije: ojalá quede aquí*” (F2). “*Vine, de hecho, para investigar un poco sobre la universidad y me pareció muy bien realmente tiene muchas cosas que, como los programas de intercambio, el SAC que es solo para inglés, cosas así*” (A2). “*Pues tenía muy buenas expectativas porque mis hermanas aquí se graduaron*” (P3).

In contrast, two failing, two average, and three passing students had negative expectations. These participants claimed that the University of Quintana Roo did not seem as good as other universities: “*No me imaginaba terminar aquí, se podría decir que hasta cierto punto la descartaba porque pensaba que no era lo suficiente competitiva con otras universidades*” (P15). And that it

looked like as a substandard institution: “*Que era una universidad chafa. Pues porque no se veía la gran cosa. De hecho, ni siquiera pensaba que era una universidad*” (F1).

4.2.1.3 Prior expectations about the major

Nine out of seventeen participants provided their expectations about the major *Lengua Inglesa*. Results show that three participants (one passing and two average students) had negative expectations of the major whereas six participants (two average and four passing students) had positive expectations. As for negative expectations of the major, one participant perceived *Lengua Inglesa* as difficult since she would not be able to succeed: “*Creí que iba a estar difícil [THE MAJOR], muy muy difícil que no iba a poder*” (A2).

Additionally, one average student believed that the major would be boring: “*Pensaba que iba a ser también aburrido el hecho de que íbamos a estar sentados en una clase*” (A5).

At the same time, participant P11 was confused about the recent modification concerning the major’s curriculum (*Lengua Inglesa*’s new academic curriculum was established in 2015); therefore, participant P11 initial expectations about the major were considered as negative since she felt disoriented about what the major would involve: “[...] *Me confundía un poquito porque yo venía con la idea de ser traductora no en realidad ser maestra de inglés*” (P11).

As for positive expectations, four participants (two average and two passing students) expected the curriculum of *Lengua Inglesa* to be adequate: “*Porque anteriormente había leído un plan de estudios, pero era el anterior entonces eso fue lo que me motivó a entrar a la carrera*” (A6). “*Vi las carreras que había y como que lengua inglesa y como que leí el paquete [curriculum] y me gustó*” (P6).

Moreover, participant P3 had positive expectations about the major since he knew from his sisters that *Lengua Inglesa* was an interesting major to study:

“*Mis hermanas aquí se graduaron de la carrera, [...] ya me habían platicado muchísimo de la universidad, [...] me dicen que hay muy buenos maestros, el plan de estudios es muy bueno, la carrera es muy buena, que me va a ayudar muchísimo. [...] Entonces me puse a investigar y vi que era inglés e idiomas, entonces me llamó la atención*” (P3).

Finally, one passing student expected more adequate and productive English learning activities: *“Pensé que iba a aprender más inglés que otras materias que hay aquí, las que son de relleno, y que íbamos a hablarlo, pensé que íbamos a practicar mucho el speaking”* (P14).

In short, prior expectations are mainly described as negative since participants perceived difficulty, boredom and confusion towards the major. In contrast, positive expectations portray students’ views of an adequate *Lengua Inglesa* curriculum as well as an interest for the major and an expectation concerning the amount of learning activities.

4.2.3 Second stage of the transition

This section discusses the perceptions of the participants regarding their experiences during the second stage of the transition. Therefore, participants explained how their previous expectations of the university and the English major changed once they enrolled at the university. At the same time, this section presents participants’ beliefs regarding the consequences of selecting *Lengua Inglesa* as their major which originated after they enrolled.

4.2.3.1 Expectations of the university after enrollment

Participants’ negative expectations about the university changed the moment they enrolled in the course. As for positive expectations, participants did not change their opinions.

Results indicate that all negative expectations about the university changed to positive opinions; participants who previously believed the university had a substandard quality perceived the university as competent in terms of education, academic resources, and facilities: *“Me dejó deslumbrada porque, como antes mencioné, me ofrece muchas cosas que realmente yo desconocía, es una escuela competente a todas y considero que igual depende del alumno entonces realmente la universidad es muy buena”* (P15). *“[...] Con el paso del tiempo que estuve estudiando aquí pues me di cuenta que tienen buena infraestructura porque los salones cuentan con clima, el baño está limpio, cuenta con papel, los recursos para los estudiantes”* (P10).

4.2.3.2 Expectations of the major after enrollment

Expectations about *Lengua Inglesa* changed once participants enrolled in the English course. In this sense, all negative expectations changed to positive beliefs, some positive expectations changed to negative statements, few participants with positive expectations kept their opinions, and the ones that did not provide answers regarding prior expectations were able to express their thoughts about the major as enrolled students.

First, the negative expectations of four participants towards the major changed to positive perceptions. The prior negative expectations are listed below including individual quotes to illustrate the changes.

- Participant A2 perceived that the major would be a difficult task to achieve, but she modified her opinion: “*No es realmente muy estresante como creí que iba a ser*” (A2).
- Participant A5 thought *Lengua Inglesa* would be boring, but eventually she claimed that the major was beneficial: “*Creo que me beneficia mucho (A SU APRENDIZAJE)*” (A5).
- Participant P11 was initially confused about the change of the major curriculum, but once she knew more about it, she was interested: “[...] *El contenido de ser maestra de inglés y el perfil que leí yo de cuando ya te egresas me gustó entonces como que sí, sí me gusta*” (P11).

In contrast, two positive expectations of the English major’s content were replaced by negative perceptions since participants A4, P10 were concerned about the elimination of a translation course from the curriculum: “*Algo que me sacó bastante de onda fue el cambio de el plan de estudios, que habían eliminado traducción*” (A4).

In addition to these results, participant F3 had positive expectations about the major, but they changed to negative since the major curriculum resulted completely different for her: “[...] *No era la carrera que yo esperaba, o sea, en mi mente pensaba que ah es lo que yo quería, pero me di cuenta en el transcurso de que no fue lo que yo quise*” (F3).

Moreover, participant P14 had positive expectations about *Lengua Inglesa* concerning learning English with different methods, but she eventually realized that the learning system for

this subject did not meet her expectations: “*Sólo hacemos muchas cosas gramaticales. No escuchamos o no hablamos muchas veces en inglés, en especial hablar, nunca hablamos, solo si son exámenes*” (P14).

Then, six participants did not provide any prior expectations about *Lengua Inglesa*, however, four of these students had positive opinions about the major once they enrolled; therefore, they believed that the major was beneficial and helpful for their learning: “[...] *Igual la carrera, al ver desde el primer semestre que ya concluí la verdad yo quedé satisfecha, no siento que me haya decepcionado, al contrario, siento que ahora voy bien y pues me gusta*” (P13).

Finally, two participants without prior expectations shared their opinions about the major which concern an unexpected form of learned wrong pronunciation and a demanding level of English.

“*Creo que uno de los choques más grandes que tuve fue la pronunciación [...]. Te das cuenta de que todo lo que te enseñaron a pronunciar está mal y tienes qué olvidarte de todo lo que aprendiste y volver a empezar de nuevo así que es complicado*” (P5).

“*Muchas cosas de las que vimos en inglés 1 yo las desconocía y me costó bastante aprenderlas porque antes vi muy poco el inglés y en el último semestre de preparatoria no vi nada de inglés, entonces tenía que volver a empezar desde cero, había cosas que las tenía que aprender desde cero*” (P12).

4.2.3.3 Consequences of major selection

As for participants who had *Lengua Inglesa* as a first choice, eight out of ten participants provided opinions about the consequences of their decisions. Six students (A2, A6, P3, P5, P12, P13) agreed that the major design was helpful to learn English: “[...] *Siento que voy a salir beneficiada de aquí independientemente de que no sea lo que yo quería, pero voy a tener conocimiento de inglés y avanzar lo más*” (A6).

In contrast, both participants F3, and P10 expressed that, despite selecting *Lengua Inglesa* as their first choice, the major content itself failed to meet their initial expectations formed when they decided to enroll at the university: “[...] *Lo que yo quiero no abarca nada de lo que aprendí*

aquí, o sea, el inglés sí, pero aquí te preparan para docencia y yo no quiero estudiar docencia” (F3). “Pues porque antes se llevaban las materias de traducción [...] no me quería enfocar directo a la pedagogía y quería esperar un tiempo, pues podía trabajar de traductor y así, en cambio ahorita no, es centrado en la pedagogía.” (P10).

As for participants who did not selected the major as their first option, all of them exhibited positive impressions about the major once they enrolled. Therefore, four participants (A1, P6, P11, P15) revealed being motivated by the major despite their choice, as participant A1 explained:

“[...] No era la carrera que yo quería, pero ya después me puse a pensar que obviamente luego de que vi que la carrera se enfocaba a la docencia, entonces dije que voy a tener la oportunidad en algún momento de poder trabajar con niños, cuando yo quería ser educadora.” (A1)

Finally, the rest of the participants (A4, A5, P14) asserted that *Lengua Inglesa* was beneficial for their English language learning: *“No tenía planeado estar aquí así que no había aprendido nada de inglés yo en serio estaba centrada en la danza [...], pero el estar aquí sí me benefició en aprender varias cosas de inglés” (A5).*

4.2.4 Unfamiliar conditions

The following section presents four points regarding the unfamiliar conditions that participants found during the second stage of their transition from high school to university. In this sense, participants provided information about an *increased pressure to excel*, *ineffective instruction from teachers*, *stringent grading practices*, and *new social networks* concerning classmates.

4.2.4.1 Increased pressure to excel

Participants were asked about the pressure to excel that they might have experienced during the English course as a result of the unfamiliar conditions that they were facing. Overall, 11

participants perceived this pressure to excel and 5 said they did not have such a pressure. In addition, two types of pressure to excel were identified: 1) external and 2) internal.

4.2.4.1.1 *External and internal pressure to excel*

Both external and internal pressure concerned a number of conditions that influenced participants to excel during the course. As a result, all of the participants who perceived a form of pressure to excel explained that they were motivated in some way to learn English. Therefore, 4 average, and 6 passing students experienced an external pressure to excel. This pressure came from their *classmates' level of English, their teacher, and family*. These findings, in contrast to the original negative effect of an increased pressure to excel (Perry, 2003), seemed to positively influence participants' learning progress during their transition: “*El ver a los demás que pueden y hacen muchas cosas padres. Eso es lo que siento que me motiva a decir sí ellos pueden yo también debería poder, solo es cosa de estudiarlo y enfocarme más*” (A2). “*Pues igual porque él [THE TEACHER] esperaba que nosotros saliéramos bien y en parte igual como que sentías esa presión de querer, que se sienta orgulloso de ti*” (P10). “[...] *Por parte de mi papá, porque me decía échale ganas, apréndete esto y esto estudia más, entonces supongo que de él que siento un poquito de presión*” (A6).

In contrast, one failing and one average had an internal pressure to excel which were explained as a *commitment to improve in English* as a personal goal: “*No. Podría decir que era presión mía, nada más. Porque yo me obligaba a como que a superarme, solo era eso*” (F1). “[...] *Por parte mía de obtener esa calificación, entonces siento que la presión como que viene de mí misma*” (A1).

4.2.4.2 *Ineffective instruction*

Participants were asked about their *teachers' methodologies* and how they influenced their language learning achievement. Table 2 shows how participants were distributed among three

classrooms with their respective English teacher. A total of three English teachers (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 3) were involved in the Fall Course of the *Lengua Inglesa* major in 2018.

Table 2.

Participants and English teachers (F: failing; A: average; P: passing)

| PARTICIPANTS | TEACHER 1 | TEACHER 2 | TEACHER 3 |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| F1 | ✓ | | |
| F2 | | ✓ | |
| F3 | | | ✓ |
| A1 | ✓ | | |
| A2 | ✓ | | |
| A4 | | ✓ | |
| A5 | | ✓ | |
| A6 | | | ✓ |
| P3 | ✓ | | |
| P5 | ✓ | | |
| P6 | ✓ | | |
| P10 | | ✓ | |
| P11 | | ✓ | |
| P12 | | ✓ | |
| P13 | | ✓ | |
| P14 | | | ✓ |
| P15 | | | ✓ |

Compiled by the author based on the SAE portal from the University of Quintana Roo (2019)

4.2.4.2.1 Teachers' methodologies

Regarding teachers' ineffective instruction, two participants perceived their English teachers' methodologies as ineffective.

One average (A2) and one passing student (P5) claimed that their teachers' methodologies were based on scarce learning methods and only focused on the English book. Also, both participants

agreed that these methodologies were not beneficial at all for their language learning achievement. Coincidentally, these participants shared the same English teacher (Teacher 1). “Solo veíamos cosas del libro” (A2). “El profe solo lo explicaba y ya todo lo demás era como que nuestro, entonces es ahí donde yo fallo, a mí no me gusta trabajar así” (A2). “Siento que se quedaba muy corto, nos enseñaba nada más lo que el libro decía” (P5). “Sólo las veíamos de manera teórica, nunca las usamos como que de manera oral o de manera activa” (P5).

In contrast, 15 out of 17 participants believed that the methodologies of their teachers were suitable and adequate:

“Me enseñaba muy bien [Teacher 1]. Me enseñaba muy bien, por eso aprendí bien, porque era muy paciente y cuando le preguntabas algo que no sabías lo explicaba y lo desmenuzaba muy bien, entonces como que ahora ya no era como en la prepa de que le preguntas al maestro y ah, ya lo expliqué, sino que él te decía esto y esto y lo otro, entonces puedo decir que el profe fue muy bien, o sea, enseña muy bien” (F1).

“Fue bastante bueno [Teacher 2]. Trataba de ponernos en contexto. Creo que los contenidos iban ascendiendo, iban bastante bien, aunque esa parte de que nos trataba de forma personalizada en ocasiones sí y esa parte era la que me ayudaba a poder entender más o entender lo que estaba mal” (A4).

Consequently, these participants believed that the teaching methodologies had a positive influence on their learning achievement, they perceived them as *appropriate*, *engaging*, and *motivating*, as participants P3 explains: “Fue un impacto bueno porque sentía como que esta vez al maestro sí le importaba que aprendiera, sí le importara que yo adquiriera el conocimiento, me sentía como que motivado de ese aspecto [...]” (P3).

4.2.4.3 Stringent grading practices

Participants provided information about their teachers and the grading practices they used in their English course. Therefore, they were asked about how stringent their teachers’ grading criteria were in order to find an influence on their language learning achievement.

As previously mentioned, three English teachers were in charge of the English course that participants attended. Therefore, it was found that these teachers adopted the same grading criteria which consisted of two main grading aspects: 1) general assignments (30%) and 2) the final KET exam (70%). The following section provides participants' beliefs about their teachers' grading practices and how stringent they were.

4.2.4.3.1 Teachers' grading criteria

Participants A4, A5, P10, and P11 explained that their teacher's grading criteria were *demanding* and *stringent*. In addition, these participants had the same teacher (Teacher 2). In contrast, twelve participants believed that the grading practices of their teachers were not stringent at all.

Examining the negative perceptions towards the grading criteria of the teacher, it was found that Teacher 2 based his grading criteria on *excessive assignments*:

“La verdad que sí fue exigente porque a pesar de que tuvimos todos los trabajos, obtuvimos muchos trabajos en la plataforma, muchos trabajos escritos en el libro y todo eso, entonces sí afectó porque al final, bueno, por lo menos yo no salí bien.” (A4)

Despite the negative comments, the majority of the participants agreed that their English teachers' grading criteria resulted beneficial because of the following reason:

- The assignments were highly important to their language learning achievement (F1, F3, A5, P3, P11, P12, P14):

“Pues influyeron la verdad bastante bien [THE ASSIGNMENTS] porque me hacía esforzar un poco más, en algún momento se veía que era como que mucha tarea te dejaba muchas cosas, en realidad eso te ayudaba ya no era tanto por presión sino por apoyo.” (P12)

- To be responsible with their learning (F2, A6, P10, P13): *“Pues sí influye hasta cierto punto [THE TEACHERS' GRADING CRITERIA] para bien porque tomas conciencia de que tienes que aprender y tienes que tratar de hacer las cosas y mejorarlas.”* (A6)

In contrast, two participants (A4, P15) believed that the grading criteria were not helpful at all since they claimed that it did not allow them to have a favorable method of learning because the assignments and the final exam (KET: Key English Test) did not have equal percentages.

“[...] *Sentía mucha presión de hacerlas bien [ASSIGNMENTS] porque sabía que iba a contar como calificación entonces tenía ese miedo de salir mal en el examen entonces decía yo tengo que salir bien en lo que es las tareas para que pueda como que haber un balance, para poder pasar, aunque sea*” (A4).

“[...] *Lo que más nos preocupaba era el KET [FINAL EXAM], el pasar el KET, porque si no lo pasabas no servía de nada que tengas el diez por ciento de esto el veinte de esto.*” (P15)

4.2.4.4 *New social networks*

In this thesis study, new social networks were categorized as the influence that classmates had on the participants' learning achievement. First, participants were asked about their initial impressions on their classmates. Second, participants shared their experiences concerning the influence that their classmates had on them.

4.2.4.4.1 *Classmates' influence*

Findings indicate that eight participants had negative first impressions about their classmates. In contrast, two participants had positive perceptions. Seven responders did not have any opinions whatsoever.

In this sense, the explanations of participants' negative first impressions concerned:

- Classmates' high level of English: “*Me sentía un poco nervioso porque muchos de ellos ya sabían, entraban y hablaban inglés, entonces como que me sentía intimidado por ellos.*”

(F1)

- Social adaptation problems: “*No conocía a nadie y el acoplarme como que el hacer nuevas amistades como que sí me afectó bastante porque estaba como que yo sola.*” (A4)
- The influence of classmates’ low English level:
“*Había personas que de plano no, no sé qué hacían ahí. Pero siento que el que esas personas hayan estado ahí y ver que no muestran interés por aprender ni nada, siento que a nosotros nos llegó a afectar porque nos atrasaba y nos hacía sentir como que, o sea, por esta persona no estamos como que queriendo progresar y sí nos incomodaba un poco.*” (P13)

Concerning classmates positive influence on the participants’ learning achievement, 13 participants believed that their classmates helped them with their English learning process including the ones who claimed having negative perceptions about their classmates. As participant A6 said: “*Sí, es como que ayúdame a ayudarte entonces sí, cuando tú necesitas ellos están cuando ellos necesitan tú estás entonces nos apoyábamos mutuamente, siento que me tocó un buen grupo*” (A6).

4.2.5 Emerging categories

This section presents three additional categories that resulted from the interviews which were not foreseen in the literature. The first category, *Probability of failure*, exposes opinions by participants who believed that they would fail the course. It should be noted that these perceptions originated during the second stage of the transition. The second category was labeled as *New learning environment* and it is discussed as the additional and unfamiliar academic aspects that participants experienced the moment they enrolled at the university.

4.2.5.1 Probability of failure

Eleven participants admitted that there was a probability of failure present later on when they enrolled in the course. In contrast with expectations of success and failure (see section 4.4.3) which

appeared early in the second stage of the transition, the probability of failure emerged once participants were aware of the unfamiliar English course learning system of the university. In this regard, participants could perceive the probability of failure at some point of the course. As a result, all failing, three average and five passing students experienced the sense of probability of failure. The reasons that participants provided for this probability of failing were: *poor English knowledge, a dislike of the major, lack of learning skills, high English level of the course, and teachers grading criteria.*

In asking participants about the reasons for the unexpected probability of failure, three average students and one failing student ascribed their *poor knowledge of English* to the likelihood of failing.

“Sí, la verdad que sí. Porque sentía que no alcanzaba el nivel y afectaba mucho que había algo creo que me bloqueaba de no aprender o no poder aprenderme las estructuras por más de que tuviera cuatro horas de inglés había algo que no me permitía memorizarlo creo que era ese mismo miedo de también del conversar, de comunicarme” (A4).

“[...] No sabía muchas cosas, no sabía casi nada entonces cuando entré acá dije chispas voy a reprobar a la primera” (F1).

Participant F3 did not have the same response, however, a *dislike for the major* created this probability, as she explains:

“Al principio me puse la meta de que no porque dije le voy a echar ganas, pero ya fue de que en el trascurso y lo vi y dije sí voy a reprobar [...] por cómo iba, desanimada diciendo no pues ya no es lo que me gusta y ese desanimo que no debería de haber” (F3).

In addition, participant F2 explained that the probability of failure emerged because he lacked *learning skills*, hence, this participant predicted failing the course: *“Creo que tenía las probabilidades de reprobar por no saber en principio cómo llevar mi aprendizaje, no sabía por dónde comenzar y eso me frustró y me fui confiando y pasó lo que tuvo que pasar” (F2).*

Finally, five Passing Students provided two different reasons for the probability of failure; the *teacher’s grading criteria* and the *high English level of the course*:

“[...] Viendo la forma de calificar era como que 70 por ciento el examen y 30 por ciento de otra cosa como que quedé en shock porque el inglés de la preparatoria era como que un 30 por ciento o 40 no sé, pero aquí como que sí había esa posibilidad de reprobar” (P3).

“Sí, porque pues en el último semestre de la prepa no llevé inglés y era así de que al entrar y que me estén lloviendo esto y esto como que ya sabía algunas cosas, pero pues sí se me complicaba” (P10).

4.2.5.2 *New learning environment*

Ten participants were aware of the *new learning environment* that they experienced through the second stage of the transition. This category originated from the opinions that participants provided related to how they visualized the university regarding the unfamiliar academic settings and other features of the university that they were facing. Overall, participants’ beliefs were related to a sense of formality and responsibility, which emerged from the following perceptions:

- Students recognize the new learning environment: *“Porque antes de entrar a la universidad como que lo pensé y lo medité, ya cuando entré acá dije: esto ya es universidad, esto ya va en serio” (F1).*
- Students accept the reality of the learning settings: *“Le agarré la seriedad a la cosa, porque sentí que nada más era como que entrabas a aprender inglés y lo único que veías era inglés, entonces sí, mi percepción cambia en lo que es ya lo profesional, un perfil profesional” (P11).*
- Students take responsibility of their learning: *“[...] Me di cuenta de que ya todo dependía de mí, no depende de otra cosa, ya era mi problema” (P13).*

The following table shows how participants relate to each of the three perceptions. Six participants recognized the new learning environment, six accepted the learning settings, and three took responsibility of their own learning. In addition, three participants (F2, A4, P11) could both recognize and accept the new learning environment. Finally, three participants who passed the course (A6, P13, P15) claimed to have taken responsibility of their learning.

Table 3.

Participants’ new learning environment perceptions (F: failing; A: average; P: passing)

| PARTICIPANTS | RECOGNIZE THE NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT | ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE LEARNING SETTINGS | TAKE RESPONSIBILITY OF THEIR LEARNING |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| F1 | ✓ | | |
| F2 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| F3 | | ✓ | |
| A4 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| A6 | | ✓ | ✓ |
| P3 | ✓ | | |
| P6 | | ✓ | |
| P11 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| P13 | | | ✓ |
| P15 | ✓ | | ✓ |

Compiled by the author (2019)

4.3 What are the first-year English language students' beliefs regarding the causes of success or failure and expectations towards English language achievement?

This section presents the following results: 1) the causal attributions of success and failure that emerged as the reasons for participants' final grades from the English course they attended during the first semester of the *Lengua Inglesa* major, 2) the causal dimensions of the resulting attributions, 3) students' expectations of success and 4) the perceptions of the participants concerning self-appraisal evaluations of success.

4.3.1 *Attributions of success and failure based on final grades*

The main causal attributions that were identified in this thesis were based on participants' final grades. As shown in Table 3, three participants obtained less than 7.0 points (failing students), five between 7.0 to 7.9 points (average students) and nine more than 8.0 points (passing students). In this sense, a total of four attributions for success and five attributions of failure were identified. Findings show that attributions for success were exposed solely by passing students and the attributions of failure were provided by failing and average students.

Table 4.

Participants' Final Grades and Causal Attributions of Success and Failure (F: failing; A: average; P: passing)

| PARTICIPANTS | FINAL GRADES | ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUCCESS | ATTRIBUTIONS OF FAILURE |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| F1 | 6.4 | * | NOT DELIVERING ASSIGNMENTS |

| | | | |
|-----|------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| F2 | 5.5 | * | LACK OF ENGLISH KNOWLEDGE |
| F3 | 6.50 | * | THE MAJOR CURRICULUM |
| A1 | 7.0 | * | NOT DELIVERING ASSIGNMENTS |
| A2 | 7.2 | * | NOT DELIVERING ASSIGNMENTS |
| A4 | 7.2 | * | NOT DELIVERING ASSIGNMENTS |
| A5 | 7.6 | * | LACK OF EFFORT |
| A6 | 7.0 | * | THE FINAL EXAM |
| P3 | 8.3 | THE TEACHER | * |
| P5 | 10 | EFFORT | * |
| P6 | 10 | THE TEACHER | * |
| P10 | 8.7 | THE FINAL EXAM | * |
| P11 | 9.1 | EFFORT | * |
| P12 | 9.5 | THE FINAL EXAM | * |
| P13 | 10 | THE FINAL EXAM | * |
| P14 | 8.5 | DELIVERING ASSIGNMENTS | * |
| P15 | 8.0 | THE TEACHER | * |

Compiled by the author based on the transcriptions from interviews and the SAE portal from the University of Quintana Roo (2019)

Subsequently, participants' causes of success were: *the teacher* (P3, P6, P15), *the final exam* (P10, P12, P13), *effort* (P5, P11), and *delivering assignments* (P14).

First, participants portrayed *the teacher* as an important academic support which contributed to pass the course with high grades. English teachers influence was a relevant factor for participants P3, P6 and P15 since they provided, in words of students, different learning strategies as well as emotional support and motivation to achieve success: “[...] *Influyó muchísimo el maestro que me tocó en ese momento [...] y para mí es de los mejores maestros que me han tocado de inglés*” (P3). “[...] *“Porque, bueno, la maestra nos explicó, nos dijo qué estudiar, nos llevó al SAC, a practicar los KET, entonces creo que eso fue en parte la ayuda que nos ofreció la maestra”* (P15).

Second, *the final exam* (P10, P12, P13) and *delivering assignments* (P14) are attributions that are highly related. As mentioned in section 3.3 all of the teachers had the same grading criteria: 70% final exam, 30% assignments. Participants P10, P12, P13, and P14 attributions involved these methods of grading and this implies that they achieved both grading criteria. On the one hand, participants P12 and P13 believed that the main reason for their final grades was the final English KET exam since they perceived its level was easy or not complicated. At the same time, this attribution is related to their English general knowledge: “*Me fue bastante bien el examen, yo pensaba que era un poco más complicado, pero al ver la estructura ya vi que era más sencillo*” (P12). “*Más que nada ponían presión en el examen porque desde luego era lo que definía si pasabas o no [...] ya sabía más o menos qué venía y pues como era todo lo básico y ya lo había visto antes, o sea, se me hizo fácil ya no fue tan complicado, no lo sentí muy difícil*” (P13).

On the other hand, participant P10 claimed that the final exam was the reason for his final grades, however, he said that he was aware about his lack of skills for the listening part of the final exam. “[...] *Pues porque estudié y todo, pero en listening sí me fue mal, igual como que me faltó en ese aspecto*” (P10).

In addition, participant P14 causal attribution of success was *delivering assignments*. As mentioned, this attribution is related to the grading criteria by the teacher and concerns the student being able to pass the course since she accomplished the percentage of assignments. Also, the nature of her answer reveals that she could have had a low percentage on the final exam so she passed because of the assignments. “[...] *Las tareas también te ayudaban a pasar, entonces como tenía las tareas completas pues yo digo que pasé más por eso que por el examen*” (P14).

Finally, *effort* was the causal attribution that participants P5 and P11 related the most to their final grades. Here, *effort* was considered as the amount of work, study, and interest of learning that students had in order to achieve their good grades. “[...] *Vine a las clases, puse atención, traté de aprender y quedarme con ese aprendizaje, no sólo para el momento si no para seguirlo utilizando en mi día a día*” (P5). “*Porque en realidad sí me esforcé y sí estudié, sí estudié mucho*” (P11).

In contrast, causal attributions of failure were: *not delivering assignments, lack of English knowledge, the major curriculum, lack of effort, and the final exam*.

The attributions of failure were provided by failing and average students. On the one hand, the reasons of failing students for failing the course were: *not delivering assignments* (F1), *lack of*

English knowledge (F2), and *the major curriculum* (F3). On the other hand, average students' attributions were: *not delivering assignments* (A1, A2, A4), *lack of effort* (A5), and *passing the final exam* (A6).

Firstly, similar to attributions of success, and except for participant A5, average students' attributions of failure were related to the grading practices by their teachers. This means that *not delivering assignments* (A1, A2, A4) and *passing the final exam* (A6) lead participants to not achieve these grading criteria so they received low final grades (from 7.0 to 7.6): “*De promedio final obtuve 7, porque pues como no podía venir a veces no entregaba algunos proyectos que me dejaban y eso fue lo que más me afectó, no entregar ciertos trabajos y así.*” (A1). “*Supongo que recayó más en el examen, sí, todo dependía del examen. [...] Nos preparaban para presentar el examen, sí tuvimos como que la facilidad de presentar bien el examen*” (A6).

Additionally, participant F1 provided the same attribution related with assignments, however, F1 did not pass the course since this participant failed to successfully accomplish the assignments criteria required to pass the course. “*Estuve bajo por tareas, por no haber entregado tareas salí bajo*” (F1).

Participant F2 claimed to have failed the English course because he did not have enough knowledge to pass the exam, particularly he lacked enough vocabulary to understand the test.

“*Porque el examen más que nada la parte teórica estaba llena de conceptos que no lograba comprender [...] No entendía muy bien las palabras, entonces algunas sí las lograba entender y pues al final ese fue el promedio que tuve porque pues no tuve ahora sí todo el vocabulario para poder presentar el examen.*” (F2)

Subsequently, participant F3 asserted that she failed the course because of *the major curriculum*. This participant explained that the content of *Lengua Inglesa* was not what she was expecting, also, she was aware about the academic characteristics of the major which she found as disappointing so she lost interest for studying: “[...] *No era la carrera que yo esperaba, o sea, en mi mente pensaba que ah es lo que yo quería, pero me di cuenta en el transcurso de que no fue lo que yo quise*” (F3).

Finally, the attribution of failure of participant A5 was: *lack of effort*. This participant believed that she did not put effort in order to learn English. In addition, her final grades were 7.6 and this implies that this participant was not able to obtain higher points regarding the grading criteria, however, they were enough to pass the course.

“[...] *No me esforcé por aprender, no me esforcé por darle una prioridad a las clases o algo así*” (A5).

4.3.2 Causal dimensions

Attributions for success and failure were compiled and classified based on the three causal dimensions proposed by Weiner (1979). Table 4 and 5 show all attributions of success and failure categorized into the causal dimensions. Therefore, internal causal attributions of success and failure are unstable and controllable. Furthermore, external causal attributions are stable and uncontrollable.

For causal attributions of success, *effort* and *delivering assignments* are internal, unstable and controllable, whereas *the teacher* and *the final exam* are external, stable and uncontrollable.

Conversely, attributions of failure were mostly internal, unstable and controllable: *not delivering assignments*, *lack of effort*, and *lack of English knowledge*. Finally, *the final exam* and *the major curriculum* were classified as an external, stable and uncontrollable attribution of failure.

Table 5.

Causal Dimensions for Attributions of Success

| | Internal | | External | |
|-----------------|----------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Controllability | Stable | Unstable | Stable | Unstable |
| Uncontrollable | N/A | N/A | -The teacher -The final exam | N/A |
| Controllable | N/A | -Effort -Delivering assignments | N/A | N/A |

Compiled by the author (2019)

Table 6.
Causal Dimensions for Attributions of Failure

| Controllability | Internal | | External | |
|-----------------|----------|--|---|----------|
| | Stable | Unstable | Stable | Unstable |
| Uncontrollable | N/A | N/A | -The final exam -The major <i>curriculum</i> | N/A |
| Controllable | N/A | -Not delivering assignments -Lack of effort -Lack of English knowledge | N/A | N/A |

Compiled by the author (2019)

4.3.3 Expectations of success

Participants were asked about their initial expectations of the English course (*Inglés I*) that they attended. Nine of the participants had positive expectations of success and the rest provided negative expectations.

On the one hand, the causes of participants' low expectations concerned students' poor English knowledge, the English course difficulty, and the grading criteria of a teacher.

- Poor English knowledge (F1, A6, P5, and P12): "*Pues sentía que me iba a ir mal. [...] Porque no sabía nada. O sea, no sabía, pero sí sabía. Lo básico, sólo sabía una que otra palabrita*" (F1).
- English course difficulty (A2, P3, P6 and P11): "*Tenía miedo porque pensaba que era muy difícil, como ya son otras formas de, no sé, ya es como para lo que tú vas a ser y en este caso yo quiero ser maestra, [...] creo que por eso tenía ese temor de no hacerlo bien*" (P6).
- And teachers' grading criteria (P14): "*Pensé que me iba a ir mal, que iba a reprobar, porque el examen valía 70% entonces pensé que no iba a lograr*" (P14).

On the other hand, the reasons of participants' high expectations were:

- An optimism to learn English (A4): “*Pensé que me iba a ir bien la verdad, iba con una expectativa de: vamos a aprender*” (A4).
- The major was motivating (F3): “*Yo creía que me iba a ir bien, tenía esa mente de decir bien porque pues es lo que me gusta, o sea, entré porque pues me gusta, me gustaba al principio y dije no pues voy a pasar y le voy a echar muchas ganas*” (F3).
- Previous English knowledge (P10 and P13): “*Pues de acuerdo a lo que sabía pues como estuve en un curso básico yo pensé que me iba a ir bien, que iba a sacar una calificación más alta de la que obtuve*” (P10).
- The easiness of the English course (P15): “*Pensaba que no se me haría tan difícil, pero cuando empecé a ver pues sí se me hizo demasiado fácil*” (P15).

4.3.4 Students’ self-appraisal of success

This section describes the results concerning participants’ self-appraisal of success. During the interviews, participants were asked give an opinion about their own learning achievement so they could decide whether they were successful or unsuccessful in their English learning language achievement.

Results indicate that nine participants believed that they were not successful. Two failing, four average and one passing student ascribed their perception to their low or insufficient learned level of English. As participant A4 claimed: “[...] *Lo que yo tengo no es suficiente para lo que me están exigiendo en el primer semestre*” (A4).

Furthermore, participant A1 associated the lack of success to his unsatisfactory *final grades* and participant P10 to *shyness*: “*No era la calificación que yo quería, o sea no me sentí satisfecha cuando me la dieron, entonces creo que por esa parte no soy exitosa*” (A1). “*No era una persona que digas que tan sociable y todo pues en parte como que me da pena de hablar y pues se me complica un poco*” (P10).

In contrast, eight participants claimed being successful. Four of them claimed that they were successful because of the *amount of English knowledge they acquired*, as P3 said: “*Porque a comparación que cuando entré a la prepa mejoré muchísimo, ya sabía más reglas gramaticales,*

ya sé más vocabulario, me considero alguien exitoso en ese aspecto del aprendizaje del inglés de poder aprender más” (P3).

Moreover, two passing students mentioned they were successful because they believed the *level of English of the course was basic* for them: *“Inglés 1 es algo que lo básico, o sea, sinceramente es algo que vengo aprendiendo desde la primaria, lo he visto desde la primaria, la secundaria y hasta la prepa, nunca avanzamos más del nivel básico del nivel de inglés 1” (P13).*

Finally, two passing students had a positive perception of success because of his *effort*: *“Por las tareas, dejaban varias tareas de inglés, pero sí me esforzaba a hacerlas de verdad” (P14).*

4.4 Summary of results

Findings presented in Chapter Four answered the two research questions of this thesis which main objective was to describe the influence of causal attributions of first-year English language learners on their achievement and expectations of success that emerged from their transition from high school to university.

First, results regarding research question one (what are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning?) presented the categories from Tinto (1989) and Perry (2003) which are immersed during the transition from high school to university (first stage: prior expectations of the major and the university, and selection of the major; second stage: expectations after enrollment and unfamiliar conditions).

Findings from this thesis concerning Tinto's transition stages, Perry's unfamiliar conditions and the two emerging categories were classified as academic and social elements of the transition from high school to university; hence, these elements described the academic and social experiences of participants' transition process. Additionally, the resulting attributions of these elements were exposed as actual explanations of students' academic language achievement immersed in all the categories that emerged during the university transitions of participants. In this regard, the major *Lengua Inglesa* could have had a positive influence on participants since the majority believed that it was beneficial for their learning. However, the major curriculum was seen as unfavorable by some students because it did not meet their expectations. Concerning prior expectations about the major and the university, negative expectations tended to change to positive once students enrolled. Expectations are described as part of the university transition and, in consequence, it could have influenced students learning achievement.

Next, results concerning unfamiliar conditions show diverse perspectives and beliefs. First, participants provided external and internal forms of pressure to excel which originated from different causes. Attributions for external pressure were: *classmates' level of English, teachers, and family*. Internal pressure was seen as a commitment to improve in English. Second, ineffective instruction exposed two perspectives; on the one hand, some participants believed that their *teachers' methodologies* were unfavorable and not adequate. On the other hand, the majority believed

that their teacher had a positive influence on their learning. Third, similar to teachers' methodologies, the participants claimed that their teachers grading criteria were both beneficial and unfavorable for their learning. Some explained that *the grading criteria* were stringent and they believed they could affect their learning. In contrast, the majority agreed that the grading criteria of their teachers was beneficial. Fourth, *classmates* had also positive and negative influence on participants learning. On the one hand, participants believed that the high level of English of their classmates was not beneficial for them since they felt overwhelmed. Also, one student claimed being affected by her classmates' low level of English because they were controlling the progress of the class. On the other hand, the majority of the participants claimed that their classmates were a positive influence because they were helping each other with their learning.

Finally, two emerging categories were found that belong to the second stage of transition. On the one hand, *Probability of failure* was exposed as a category that displays participants' concerns related to "expectations of failure" which emerged at some point during the second stage of their transitions. Further, the causes of this probability of failure were: *poor English knowledge, dislike of the major, lack of learning skills, high English level of the course, and teachers grading criteria*. On the other hand, the category *New learning environment* provided information about participants' opinions about the unfamiliar academic experiences that were linked to a sense of novel responsibility originated from the university settings they faced. Findings suggest that the new learning environment of the university induced a sense of *new academic responsibility* which could have helped students to face the unfamiliar learning environment of their transitions.

In regard with the second research question (what are the first-year English language students' beliefs regarding the causes of success or failure and expectations of success towards English language achievement?) results showed four causal attributions of success (*the teacher, the final exam, effort and delivering assignments*) and five attributions of failure (*not delivering assignments, lack of English knowledge, the major curriculum, lack of effort, and the final exam*). Also, the causal dimension classification indicated that the attributions of success and failure were mostly internal, controllable and unstable causes.

Then, results of expectations of success indicate that participants had high and low expectations right before they started the course. High expectations were explained with the following attributions: *optimism to learn English, the major was motivating, previous English knowledge, the*

easiness of the English course. Attributions for low expectations were: students' poor English knowledge, the English course difficulty, and the grading criteria of the teacher.

Finally, as for the self-appraisal of success category, participants described how successful they were in regard with their learning achievement. Findings show that unsuccessful students claimed to attribute their beliefs to *low/insufficient learned level of English, final grades, and shyness*. In contrast, successful participants' attributions were: *the amount of English they acquired, the English course level was basic, and effort*.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory research was to describe the influence of causal attributions of first-year English language learners on their achievement and expectations of success that emerged from their transition from high school to university.

Two research questions were designed:

1: *What are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning?*

2: *What are the first-year English language students' beliefs regarding the causes of success or failure and expectations of success towards English language achievement?*

In this sense, findings concerning these questions are discussed in this chapter as follows: first, question one discusses the information of the findings displayed in Chapter Four concerning the academic and social elements from the transition from high school to university regarding the causal attributions of success and failure that are associated with these elements, which were found during the first and second stage of the transition (Tinto, 1989). In addition, this question includes the unfamiliar conditions by Perry (2003) and two new categories: probability of failure and new learning environment.

Then, the second question is discussed in light of the findings from the causal attributions of success and failure based on participants' final grades. In this sense, this section discussed the relation of attributions to participants' expectations of success and causal dimensions which, at the same time, are contrasted with students' final grades and self-appraisal of success.

5.2 First stage

This stage concerns participants' beliefs regarding their decisions for selecting the major as their first or second choice as well as the prior expectations about the University of Quintana Roo and the *Lengua Inglesa* major.

5.2.1 Major Selection

According to Tinto (1989) the major selection moment occurs during the first stage of the transition and concludes the moment students enroll at the institutions. This thesis examined the major selection process of seventeen participants which consisted of their decision for enrolling at the university and selecting *Lengua Inglesa* as their major. Results indicate that there were two groups of participants; the first one was composed of students who selected the major as their first choice and the second one by participants that had *Lengua Inglesa* as their second or last option. In addition, this section provides the opinions of these students regarding their experiences attending the major. This last issue was associated with participants' prior expectations (see section 4.1) since this category seems to be linked to the influence of selecting the major.

Findings indicate that ten participants selected *Lengua Inglesa* as their first choice. On the one hand, participants F1, F2, F3 and A2 chose the major since they believed that it would increase the possibilities for them to find a job related to the English language. On the other hand, participants A6, P3, P5, P10, P12 and P13 believed that *Lengua Inglesa* was the best option to learn English and enhance their language learning abilities.

In contrast, findings show that *Lengua Inglesa* was not the first choice for seven participants; consequently, the most frequent explanation for this matter was that students wanted to study something else, but due to their unfavorable economic situations and not being accepted in other institutions they eventually enrolled at the university. For this reason, in this study the economic circumstances were relevant when it comes to the process of selecting a major or a university. This issue was explored by Carrasco, Zuñiga, and Espinoza (2014) and explained that the economic

difficulties of university students may have a significant influence when it comes to selecting a major.

5.2.2 Prior expectations of the university and the major

Following Tinto's stages (1989), students were able to share their opinions concerning their prior expectations about *the university* and the major *Lengua Inglesa*. Hence, students were asked about their expectations of the University of Quintana Roo and the major based on the information they had before enrolling. For the purpose of this research, participants' expectations of the university and the major were classified as positive and negative expectations.

Results indicate that seven participants (one failing, three average, and three passing students) believed that the university had an adequate quality since they thought they would meet a qualified and prepared institution. Participants' expectations may be explained by their necessity to find an adequate and certified institution that can meet students' needs (Fukushi, 2010). Additionally, according to Ramírez (2013) and Álvarez, López and Pérez (2015), one of the reasons for students to select a university concerns their perceptions of the institutions' superior quality or status, as it is suggested by participant A6: "*Porque anteriormente había leído un plan de estudios, pero era el anterior entonces eso fue lo que me motivó a entrar a la carrera*" (A6).

In contrast, two failing, two average and three passing students with low expectations of the university pictured its quality as poor because they believed that the University of Quintana Roo was not as qualified as the rest of institutions in Cozumel. These assumptions may have emerged from their personal view of the universities that are different in terms of their conditions as public or private. Actually, the University of Quintana Roo is the only public institution on the island. Hence, participants' opinions, whether they were positive or negative, could be based on mere speculations and unreal beliefs about the public education in Mexico, as participant P15 mentions: "*No me imaginaba terminar aquí, se podría decir que hasta cierto punto la descartaba porque pensaba que no era lo suficiente competitiva con otras universidades*" (P15). In this respect, Monsiváis (2008) observes that certain people tend to suppose that public institutions are inadequate regarding the academic systems. Nevertheless, the prestige of a university should be based on

proven quality (Alvarado and Sánchez, 2015) that would lead students to create accurate perceptions (Araya, 2010). In this regard, some participants from this thesis study were aware of the university's quality (academic system and physical environment) the moment they were considering enrolling the institution.

Similar to university expectations, results show that one passing and two average students had low expectations about the *Lengua Inglesa* major. Firstly, participant A2 claimed that she would face a difficult or demanding major: “*Creí que iba a estar difícil [The major], muy muy difícil que no iba a poder*” (A2). This kind of expectation may have resulted from the general English knowledge that this participant had before she enrolled. Zavala, Ortiz, and Meléndez (2019) assert that students with a basic level of English had lower expectations concerning learning English in a university than students with a higher level. Consequently, participant A2 stated during her interview that she considered her previous English level as basic; hence, her negative expectations could have been formed by her own judgment concerning her knowledge in English.

Second, participant A5 believed that *Lengua Inglesa* would be boring: “*Pensaba que iba a ser también aburrido el hecho de que íbamos a estar sentados en una clase*” (A5).

Third, participant P11 had low expectations about the major since she felt confused about the change of the curriculum: “[...] *Me confundía un poquito porque yo venía con la idea de ser traductora no en realidad ser maestra de inglés*” (P11)

Conversely, participant P3 thought that *Lengua Inglesa* would be an interesting major to enroll to since his sisters, who graduated from the university, recommended it: “[...] *Me dicen que hay muy buenos maestros, el plan de estudios es muy bueno, la carrera es muy buena, que me va a ayudar muchísimo*” (P3). In addition, the high expectations of two average and two passing students were mostly related to the curriculum which students envisioned as adequate and interesting: “*Porque anteriormente había leído un plan de estudios, pero era el anterior entonces eso fue lo que me motivó a entrar a la carrera*” (A6). Finally, participant P14 predicted an adequate and productive English learning experience: “*Pensé que iba a aprender más inglés que otras materias que hay aquí, las que son de relleno, y que íbamos a hablarlo, pensé que íbamos a practicar mucho el speaking*” (P14). Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, and Rogers (2013) assert that first-year university students tend to create internalized images of what they will encounter in a university. These images are commonly formed by social factors or are influenced by a family circle, as in the particular case of participant P3. Moreover, regarding high expectations about the

quality of the major contents, answers by participants A6 and P10 were similar to participants' prior high expectations of the university. Again, Maunder et al. (2013) explain that previous opinions about the academic characteristics of an institution tend to originate from "pre-transitional images" about a university which students conceptualize universities as superior establishments. Then, participants might have visualized the contents of the major (specifically, its curriculum and the learning methods) as academically advanced and, consequently, they formed positive expectations.

To conclude, expectations concerning the transition from high school to university are crucial elements that could damage first-year students' perceptions and academic performance (Tinto, 1989) or enhance them. As for this thesis, no evidence was found regarding a direct influence of prior expectations on students' learning achievement and performance. Also, expectations were not seen as a possible cause of failure. However, learners' expectations concerning the major and the university were displayed as unstable since they changed during the transition from high school to university. These findings are discussed in the following section.

5.3 Second stage

In this stage, participants were able to experience every aspect of the major and the university during the first weeks of the transition. Also, participants displayed their beliefs concerning the effects for selecting *Lengua Inglesa*. In consequence, the majority of the expectations were not fulfilled and the consequences for the major selection were seen as both beneficial and unfavorable.

5.3.1 Expectations after enrolling

Results show that expectations about the university and the major changed once participants enrolled. These results strongly imply that participants did not keep their prior negative expectations since they perceived the university as competent and its facilities as adequate once they had the

opportunity to experience them. Thus, findings indicate that expectations could be considered as unrealistic. In this regard, Nel, Troskie-de Bruin, and Bitzer (2009) suggest that first-year students are prone to experience both unrealistic expectations and perceptions, which have mainly a negative influence. This means that the positive prior expectations are not met after enrolling at university, as a result, negative academic perceptions originate. In this thesis, it seems that the change of expectations was beneficial, since prior expectations were negative and students were aware of a positive influence.

Participants' expectations could have originated when students were in the process of getting information about the schools that they were considering enrolling. According to Krieg (2013), the nature of expectations is molded depending on how much students know about the university they are about to enroll. In the case of this research, it is possible that participants' negative expectations were mere assumptions based on little experience and understanding about the University of Quintana Roo or even a poor or wrong promotion of the university. In this sense, participants' expectations of the university and the major could be described as unrealistic since they experienced a positive environment (instead of negative) concerning the major *Lengua Inglesa* and the university, hence, their negative expectations were not realistic. Crisp et al. (2009) claim that unrealistic expectations may emerge from misunderstandings of the information that is provided about the university. Also, Tinto (1989) asserts that students might create expectations based on what they previously learned about the institutions they will study in. Furthermore, Nel, Troskie-de Bruin, and Bitzer (2009) assert that unrealistic expectations of a university may influence student's transition.

Concerning this thesis research, the effects of unrealistic expectations were positive for most of the participants since they claimed that both the major and the university features were beneficial for their English learning achievement, therefore, their transition processes were favorable.

5.3.2 Consequences of major selection

Results show that ten participants, including the ones who did not choose *Lengua Inglesa* as their first choice, believed that selecting the major was beneficial for their English learning achievement.

These results differ from the study by Rodríguez and Vindas (2005) who conclude that students that enroll a major they did not want to study may influence negatively their persistence at school. In contrast, this research suggests that previous major selection does not necessarily influence or determine students learning achievement. However, results indicate that there were two students who, despite they selected *Lengua Inglesa* as they first choice, were not satisfied at all with the major content and claimed that their expectations were not fulfilled.

Additionally, it seems that the major selection can be linked to students' prior expectations since these participants were able to form expectations about the major based on its curriculum and academic contents. Additionally, participants A6 and P3 (additional participants that had *Lengua Inglesa* as first choice) explained that their positive expectations of the major were related to an adequate curriculum. Hence, despite they did not mention this was the reason why they enrolled in *Lengua Inglesa*, their expectations could have positively influenced their decisions. Consequently, the curriculum of a major is seen as an influential factor for selecting a university and it could result in positive or negative outcomes (Alcocer and Sosa, 2011; Nadelson et al., 2013).

Finally, major selection, as one of the elements of the second stage of the transition, displayed participants' views about the reasons why they chose *Lengua Inglesa* as first or second option. In this regard, it was found that participants' decisions for selecting the major as their first choice concerned academic reasons such as enhancing their language knowledge, as well as a motivation to reach certain level of English in order to find a job. In contrast, students that considered the major as their second choice explained that they enrolled because of their economic situations and because they were not accepted in other institutions. Despite these perspectives, a great number of participants considered that they would obtain positive results regarding their language learning achievement.

Equally important, major selection is a relevant characteristic regarding the expectations of participants since their decisions may be influenced, positively or negatively, by academic factors such as the quality of the major and the university or the contents of the major. However, the solely decision to enroll the university did not have a significant influence on participants' language learning achievement.

5.4 Unfamiliar conditions

This section discusses the unfamiliar conditions that participants experienced during their transitions from high school to university. These categories include: increased pressure to excel, ineffective instruction, stringent grading practices, and new social networks.

5.4.1 Increased pressure to excel (external and internal pressure to excel)

Findings indicate that two forms of pressure to excel were identified: 1) the external pressure to excel which is conceived as external elements that lead participants to experience this pressure and 2) the internal pressure to excel that concerns participants' personal aspirations which may be exposed as a form of motivation.

According to Davis (2014), university first-year students experience a pressure to succeed that may emerge from different sources. In this context, most of the average students claimed that their external pressure to excel came mainly from classmates. Majumdar and Ray's (2010) findings illustrate that classmates can influence university students negatively since students face academic stress. This stress was not present in the students from this thesis research. As a result, *classmates* as an external pressure to excel was not necessarily negative since participants felt motivated by them to perform well and achieve a proper level of English; for instance, participant A2 claims: "*El ver a los demás que pueden y hacen muchas cosas padres. Eso es lo que siento que me motiva a decir sí ellos pueden yo también debería poder, solo es cosa de estudiarlo y enfocarme más*".

Similarly, the role of the teacher as an external pressure to excel concerns a form of extrinsic motivation since participants claimed that their English teachers motivated them in some way to perform well. Teachers of English as a second language are portrayed as an extrinsic motivation for students since they provide motivational practices, commitment, behavior and attitude towards the class, and interaction with learners (Williams and Burden, 1997; Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008; Veronica, 2008; Fen and Kiat, 2015).

In addition, one passing student (P5) and one average student (A6) perceived an external pressure to excel from their families. On the one hand, and similar to pressure from classmates, the average student claimed to be motivated by her family. Grabau (2009) notes that family pressure to do well is a form of extrinsic motivation. On the other hand, the passing student explained to have a pressure to excel from her parents. In Mudhovozi's (2012) work this problem is seen as a fear of failure since one of the author's participants believed that their parents demanded good results, hence, students had the pressure to do well. Concerning this thesis study, the participant did not manifest a fear of failure, but she felt forced to have positive results in order to make a good impression on her family.

Alternatively, the participants with internal pressure to excel believed that they had to be successful regarding the following reasons: to improve in English (on one failing student) and to get good grades (on one average student). Consequently, two of the participants with internal pressure to excel could have had a form of intrinsic motivation in order to improve academically, as participant A1 said: “[...] *por parte mía de obtener esa calificación, entonces siento que la presión como que viene de mí misma.*” These perceptions of pressure to excel may be explored as a form of intrinsic motivation in language learning since students with this motivation have an internal desire to learn (Gardner, 1985).

In summary, despite the initial objective of this section was to find evidence of the causes of increased pressure to excel during the transition, it was found that participants were conscious about internal and external forms of motivation to learn English rather than a single pressure to succeed. Also, since participants recognized *pressure* as *motivation*, this academic element was suggested as a positive feature of the transition from high school to university.

5.4.2 Ineffective instruction (teachers' methodologies)

Overall, teachers' methodologies were mostly perceived as positive since participants' perceptions of their teachers' methodologies involved, as they claimed, the variety of teaching methods and the academic tutorials that English teachers would normally provide.

In regard of this thesis, just two participants perceived their English teachers' methodologies as ineffective since they explained that their teacher focused only on one teaching method: the use of the English workbook. Mudhovozi (2012) found that the teaching style of university teachers was an academic stressor since students found the teaching methods different from their high schools. This might explain why some of the participants from this study recognize their teachers' influence as negative. Conversely, the majority of responders believed that they were positively influenced because of the teachers' appropriate engaging and motivating methodologies. In this sense, the importance of teaching methodologies is explored by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012) who conclude that inadequate English teaching strategies could contribute to students' negative attitude towards English language learning. Also, Manzaneda and Madrid (1997) state, teachers are an important element regarding English learners' achievement as long as they provide adequate learning methods and teacher to student interaction. Finally, some authors have developed studies in which the methodologies of teachers are seen as a crucial factor that contribute to L2 English students' learning achievement (Qin, 2007; Erten and Burden, 2014; Nguyen, Warren, Fehring, 2014). As for this thesis, the English teacher was portrayed as a positive influence since participants agreed that their teachers' methodologies were beneficial for their learning achievement.

5.4.3 Stringent grading practices (teachers' methodologies)

Findings show that the teachers' grading criteria were mostly categorized as not stringent since most of the participants explained that their teachers' grading criteria systems were not demanding and considered them as beneficial. However, four responders (A4, A5, P10, and P11) sensed their teachers' grading criteria as stringent and explained that they were based on excessive assignments. The principal explanation that participants addressed for this perception concerned a grading criteria system based on different aspects that include online assignments, tasks, the English workbook used for the course, class attendance, and weekly tests. Perceptions of excessive workload are based on diverse factors such as the hours students spend outside the university or the nature of the course (McInnis and James, 1995), however, students tend to experience difficulties when

they are overloaded with work. Then, some students from this thesis considered that they had excessive assignments, so the grading criteria of their teachers were stringent.

Despite the negative opinions towards the grading practices, the majority of participants claimed that in a way these grading practices influenced positively their learning language achievement; for instance, participant P10 explained that the grading practices encouraged him to control his learning process: “*Pues fue positivo porque me enseñaba a que tengo responsabilidades, debo cumplirlas y en tiempo y forma, ser ordenado.*”

Apart from this, the teachers’ grading criteria are considered as a significant influence for students’ learning achievement since it is linked to causal attributions. Consequently, it was found that those who ascribed their failure to *not delivering assignments* could have failed to achieve the grading criteria of their teachers which was based on assignments and the final exam. As explained in section 5.2, the weight of these two grading aspects was unequal; hence, those who failed the course or were prone to fail might have been influenced by these grading criteria affecting their learning achievement.

5.4.4 New social networks (classmates’ influence)

In general, participants’ first impression of their classmates was mostly negative. Participants were concerned about their classmates because of the following reasons: their *high and low level of English* and *social adaptation problems*. Also, one passing student reported *shyness* as a result of the initial interaction with some of their classmates. Furthermore, participants who were concerned about their classmates’ high level of English claimed that they felt intimidated so they had to make an effort to reach the same level of English. In that sense, Paul and Brier (2001) explain that first-year university students tend to be preoccupied with and concerned about their new university classmates and, eventually, manifest difficulty regarding academic adjustment. At the same time, Kantanis (2000) explains that one of the difficulties first year students face during their transition to university is dealing with the diverse postures and influences of their new classmates.

Despite the negative opinions towards classmates, the majority of the participants believed that some of their classmates were a great academic support during the course. In that regard, peer

assistance is explored by Mali (2015) who concludes that classmate support motivates students to better perform English tasks. In regard of this thesis, the majority of participants claimed that their classmates' assistance was beneficial for their English learning process. As participant P3 said: “[...] *Más que nada me ayudan en cuando no entiendo algo del inglés, sí me ayudan en mi pronunciación, en reglas gramaticales. [...] Ellos me pueden echar la mano cuando el maestro no pueda*” (P3).

The interaction among classmates is seen as a fundamental element of the university transition since peers help each other in both academic and social forms (Gómez, 2017; Mudhovozi, 2012). Furthermore, some studies (Mauder et al., 2013; Salazar, Escobar, and Montoya, 2011) show the importance of classmates regarding how influential they may be for the first-year university students' transition in terms of comparing each other or sharing experiences in order to cope with their transition and eventually influence their learning achievement. Finally, participants from this study might have experienced the “strangeness stage” (*periodo de extrañeza*) which is described as the most complex and challenging part of learners' transitions to university since students might find difficult to feel included to the new social and academic environment (Gallardo, Lorca, Morrás, and Vergara, 2014). However, in order to manage the difficulties of this stage, students tend to build social networks with their classmates and create academic strategies, such as classmates' tutorials or study groups, and eventually obtain mutual academic assistance.

5.5 Emerging categories

This section discusses two categories classified as emerging since new information was found in the interviews. First, the category Probability of failure examines participants' experiences concerning the likelihood of failure that emerged during their second stage of transition. Also, this section concludes with the discussion of the participants' perceptions of the new learning environment that displays three different views about the new academic settings and features of the University of Quintana Roo.

5.5.1 Probability of failure

As part of participants' perceptions about the English course's learning system, participants identified an unexpected probability of failing the course, also, the sense of failure originated at some point of the second stage of the transition. This issue is considered as part of the problems that students face during their transition to university (McInnis, 2001; Gallardo, Lorca, Morrás, and Vergara, 2014). As for this study, results show that two failing students and three average students were aware of the probability of failure which emerged from their *poor English level*. As participant F1 said: “[...] *No sabía muchas cosas, no sabía casi nada entonces cuando entré acá dije chispas voy a reprobar a la primera*” (F1). Similar results were found in Valle et al. (2015) since the negative expectations of their participants, regarding learning performance, align with their knowledge perceived as negative. As previously mentioned, the majority of participants from this thesis who predicted they would fail belonged to the categories failing and average. As they suggested, the perceived English level of these students was the cause of their beliefs. Further, the probability of failure that these participants displayed could have been influenced by their own level of English which was showed as low.

In addition, three passing students reported that their teachers' *stringent grading criteria* were the reason for the probability of failure. In addition, *the high English level of the course* was also a reason of the probability of failure for some of the passing students. Despite their negative expectations, these participants passed the course with higher grades than the rest. These findings differ from previous research about expectations concerning first-year university students. In this case, Merhi (2011) asserts that students with negative expectations tend to feel demotivated and, in consequence, the probability of failure is big. As previously mentioned, three students from this thesis who predicted their failure did not fail or even obtained less than 8.0 points as final grades. In this regard, Struthers, Perry and Menec (2000) observes that experiencing negative events (described here as attributions of future failure) does not predict the failure of the expected goal attainment. Nevertheless, this reciprocity can vary as it was displayed in this thesis.

Finally, the probability of failure element could be used as a predictor of students' learning achievement since they provided actual attributions in order to explain their academic situations. Additionally, the issue of probability of failure is related to motivation since negative expectations

can create on students a pessimistic mindset, which may demotivate them and affect their academic performance (Aditomo, 2015).

5.5.2 *New learning environment*

Results indicate that the new learning environment is explained as the unfamiliar contexts that manifested during the first days of the participants' university studies. This is described as a sense of formality which is interpreted as a sudden notion of seriousness and responsibility to do better at school in the academic environment of the University of Quintana Roo. In this respect, three varieties emerged:

- 1) students recognize the existence of the new learning environment.
- 2) students accept the reality of the learning settings.
- 3) students take responsibility of their own learning.

Perception number one is present in participants who identified the new learning environment as a novel feature of the university. These participants claimed: “[...] *ya es universidad y va en serio* (F1), “[...] *ya no es como la prepa [...]*” (F2), “[...] *la universidad es algo más formal [...]*” (A4), “[...] *la universidad ya es otra cosa [...]*” (P3). Similar findings were identified in the study by Urquhart and Pooley (2007) where participants claimed that they had to adjust to the new university's learning environment which was seen as a relevant issue regarding their transitions to university.

Perception number two concerns students explaining that they had to comply with certain characteristics of the new learning environment that concerned learning English. Specifically, this perception explains that students suggest that learning English in the university is a mandatory and serious element of the new learning environment. Some explanations of this issue were: “[...] *tengo que ponerme las pilas [...]*” (F2), “[...] *puse los pies en la tierra [...]*” (P6), “[...] *cae el peso de que debo aprender inglés [...]*” (A4). Larose, Bernier, and Tarabulsy (2005) conclude that first-year students might become more autonomous when it comes to managing their academic and social lives. In this sense, the unfamiliar English learning environment that participants from this thesis were exposed to could have originated their beliefs regarding learning English in a university.

Finally, perception number three emerged when participants claimed that they took the responsibility of their own learning because they believed they had to. Examples of these perceptions are: “[...] *todo dependía de mí, ya era mi problema [...]*” (P13), “[...] *tú eres el que toma las decisiones [...]*” (P15). These perceptions may be related to the last two since they are related to academic responsibility and autonomy. Some research studies show that first-year university students tend to create perceptions regarding academic responsibility (Kantanis, 2000; Hicks, 2003; Ruiz, 2006). In addition, students tend to perceive the university academic life as different from high school in terms of independence and autonomy (Crisp et al., 2009; Haya, Calvo, and Rodríguez, 2013; Torcomián, 2015) as well as a sense of control over their learning strategies (Durán-Aponte and Pujol, 2013).

In summary, these three circumstances could have influenced participants' views of their newly discovered academic responsibilities which may be explained from a psychological view as part of the effects that the transition to university entails. Moreover, participants could have perceived the sense of autonomy since they were in the transition to adulthood where they could have experienced emotional and psychological changes (Soares, Guisande, and Almeida, 2007). Also, responsibility plays a significant role during their transition since it is seen as a consequence for the new academic roles that students might meet as part of the unfamiliar learning environment (Larose, Bernier, and Tarabulsy, 2005; Urquhart and Pooley, 2007; Figuera and Torrado, 2013). As for this thesis, students were highly aware of academic responsibility, however, no clear evidence was gathered regarding the influence of new academic environment on their learning achievement.

5.6 Causal attributions

Based on their final grades, participants mentioned causal attributions whether they succeeded or failed the course. Results show diverse attributions for success and failure distributed among participants; however, both failing and average students displayed only attributions of failure and passing students showed attributions of success.

5.6.1 *Attributions of success*

Attributions for success that passing students provided were: *the teacher, effort, the final exam and delivering assignments*. Therefore, participants P3, P6, and P15 considered *the teacher* as an important influence for passing the course. This is consistent with what has been found in previous studies (Vispoel and Austin, 1995; Cubukcu, 2010; Erten and Burden, 2014; Barros and Simão, 2018) which demonstrated that teachers are a great influence for English language students since they relate their success to a proper learning environment in which teachers provide an effective instruction, classroom management, and academic interaction. In that case, findings from this thesis confirm what other studies suggest concerning *the teacher* seen as a typical attribution of success in the English language learning context (Genç, 2016; Bouchaib, Ahmadou and Abdelkader, 2018).

Furthermore, participants P5 and P11 reported getting good grades because of their *effort*, an attribution that shows participants' amount of work, study, and interest of learning during their learning processes. As participant P11 said: "*Porque en realidad sí me esforcé y sí estudié, sí estudié mucho*" (P11). This is congruent with the results of Sahinkarakas (2011) about ELL students' attributions of success and failure who found that doing homework and studying hard was a form of effort and that students attributed it to their learning achievement. These findings are similar to other studies that recognize effort as a significant attribution for both success and failure (Fernández, Arnaiz, Mejía, and Barca, 2015; Genç, 2016; Garduño et al., 2017; Barros and Simão, 2018). In addition, results of this thesis confirm Weiner's (1985) principle about causes of success and failure that describe effort, an attribution related to hard work, as one of the most dominant and common causes of success and failure. It has been vastly explored in similar studies as it is a pillar in the attribution theory (Williams, 2004; Peacock, 2009; Besimoğlu, Serdar, and Yavuz, 2010; Hashemi and Zabihi, 2011).

As for *the final exam and deliver assignments*, participants P10, P12, P13, and P14 explained that the final exam (KET: Key English Test) and the assignments they did during the course were crucial for passing the course since they are part of the grading criteria. Some participants claimed that the final exam was easy and others asserted that delivering assignments helped them

to obtain high grades. These attributions could be related to effort since several studies have found that success in English learning is generally achieved by effort (Weiner, 1985; Gobel and Mori, 2007; Phothongsunan, 2014). Apart from this, *the final exam* and *delivering assignments* were attributions connected with the grading criteria by English teachers. This means that, in order to pass the course, participants had to score high grades on their final exams and submit all of the required assignments. Nevertheless, these participants did not associate effort with the aforementioned attributions. The connection between the teachers' grading criteria and causal attributions regarding assignments and the final exam will be explained in detail in section 5.2.

5.6.2 *Attributions of failure*

The causes of failure that *failing* and *average* students provided similar attributions: *not delivering assignments*, *lack of knowledge in English*, *the major curriculum*, *lack of effort* and *the final exam*. Interestingly, average students, despite passing the course, showed attributions of failure. In this regard, it is suggested that their explanations derived from a feeling of failure since they were close to fail.

Following, participants F1, A1, A2, and A4 attributed their failure to *not delivering assignments*. Findings by Sahinkarakas (2011) show that not doing homework was one of the main attributions of failure by language learners and that it is linked to a lack of effort. Similar to attributions of success, participants from this thesis did not explicitly show effort related to delivering assignments, however, the *grading criteria* (including assignments and the final exam) of their English teachers could have negatively influenced their effort in some way.

Furthermore, the *major curriculum* is seen as an attribution of failure by participant F3. This participant explained that her expectations about the contents of *Lengua Inglesa* were not met. According to Tinto (1989), initial expectations about the academic settings of an institution can expose students to negative outcomes since those expectations are unreal. Then, participant F3 claimed that her learning achievement was affected negatively because she was not satisfied with what she was learning.

In addition, the attribution *lack of effort* was also categorized as a cause of failure by participant A5. Similar to the case of *effort* as an attribution of success, *lack of effort* is presented as one of the most common attributions of failure (Weiner, 1985; Williams, Burden, Poulet, Maun, 2004; Mori, Gobel, Thepsiri, Pojanapunva, 2010; Mekonnen and Roba, 2017; Yavuz, Hol, 2017). However, students from this thesis did not consider this attribution as a relevant cause of failure.

Finally, the attribution *lack of knowledge* was conceived by participant F2, who claimed not having enough English knowledge to understand tasks and theory, thus, this participant failed the course. Negative outcomes concerning first-year English learning students can derive from their previous experiences with the language (De Manzanilla, 2007); hence, one cause for students who failed may be linked to their own level of English. In the case of this thesis, participant F2 stated having little knowledge in English vocabulary, which caused him problems to make progress on his learning.

5.6.3 Causal dimensions and attributions

Research concerning causal attributions contributes to understand the effect of attributions on people's experiences, motivation and behavior (Weiner, 1985). The inclusion of causal dimensions is seen as crucial when it comes to the attribution theory since they might influence individuals' academic performance and emotional outcomes (Woodcock and Vialle, 2016). Then, this influence is found in the creation of causal taxonomy, which compares and contrasts causes (Weiner, 1985).

Therefore, causal dimensions classify attributions in regard with their *locus* (internal/external), *stability* (stable/unstable) and *controllability* (controllable/uncontrollable) (Weiner, 1985).

Findings from this thesis indicate that most of the resulting causal attributions of success and failure were internal, unstable and controllable. These attributions include: a) *effort, delivering assignments* and b) *not delivering assignments, lack of effort and lack of English knowledge*. This is consistent with what has been found in other studies about internal, unstable and controllable attributions of success and failure (Mkumbo and Amani, 2012; Garduño et al. 2016; Kumar and Bhalla, 2019; Soriano and Alonso, 2019).

Despite effort (or lack of effort) is considered as one of the most common academic attributions (Weiner, 1985; Graham, 1991; Peacock, 2009; Mori, Gobel, Thepsiri, Pojanapunya, 2010; Matos, Otero, and Díaz, 2017), this thesis research showed that *effort* was a minor attribution of success and failure.

As previously mentioned, five out of the total of causal attributions of success and failure were classified as internal, unstable and controllable. However, there were also external, stable and uncontrollable attributions for both success and failure causes, such as *the teacher* and *the final exam*.

The variations of causal dimensions identified here for both success and failure causes show what research says about its taxonomy description, which classifies attributions according to their locus, stability and controllability dimensions. (Weiner, 1985; Graham, 1991; Haynes et al. 2009).

First, the locus dimension determines whether the cause emerges from a person or outside. Moreover, internal causes of success are mainly linked to pride (e.g. *effort, delivering assignments*) and external causes of failure to negative self-esteem and negative emotions towards other people or external entities (e.g. *the teacher, the major curriculum*).

Second, the stability dimension distinguishes the expectancy of causes and whether they change over time. Stable attributions of failure like *the final exam* tend to persist, in contrast, unstable causes such as *lack of effort* can change over time.

Third, the controllability dimension concerns personal responsibility since individuals are believed to be responsible for controllable causes (e.g. *effort*), however, uncontrollable causes (*the major curriculum*) are beyond personal control. Also, the controllability dimension influences social emotions since controllable attributions of failure create feelings of guilt, whereas uncontrollable causes produce shame.

5.6.4 Expectations of success

In this category, participants provided their beliefs about how well they would do regarding their learning achievement on the English course they enrolled in relation to their final grades. As a result, the majority of participants (one failing, two average, and six passing students) had low

expectations. Consequently, low expectations identified in this thesis originated from: *poor English knowledge, course difficulty, and English teachers' criteria*. In contrast, high expectations of success were related to *previous English knowledge, the English course low difficulty, being motivated by the major, and being optimistic to have success*.

In short, findings suggest that more than half of the participants (nine out of fourteen) had negative expectancy of success; that is, participants with low expectations showed negative attributions such as *course difficulty*. Expectations of success and failure play a crucial role concerning learners' future success (Weiner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2009). Also, future expectancy of success in achievement contexts is determined by causal attributions (Graham, 1991; Weiner, 2010). Therefore, students' future language learning achievement could have been influenced by their attributions, an issue that is discussed in the next point.

5.6.5 *Attributions of success and failure and expectations of success*

The comparison between causal attributions and expectation of success generated certain coincidences and differences regarding causes of success and failure with initial expectancy of success.

First, participant F3 explained having initial expectations of success because of her interest in the major, however, this participant failed the course. At the same time, she attributed her failure to *the major* content, which she found inadequate. As explained in section 5.1.1, this participant lost interest for the major *Lengua Inglesa* since her prior expectations about the major *curriculum* were not satisfied.

Second, participant A4 had expectations of success, which mainly related to an optimism to learn English. This participant passed the course, but she was categorized as an average student because of her grades. Additionally, this participant provided an attribution of failure instead of success; hence, she explained that a cause for her "failure" was *not delivering assignments*. In short, the initial expectation of success regarding commitment to learn English was not similar to the given attribution of failure. This means that her expectations of success changed during the transition and, because she believed that she failed the course (despite passing) she displayed a negative opinion about her own learning achievement; eventually, this participant provided an attribution of

failure. Perry (2003) states that failure-prone students tend to be less motivated, have negative affect and have a poor academic performance. Findings suggest that the expectations of participant A4 were influenced by not delivering assignments and, in consequence, she was not motivated to perform well.

Finally, participant P10 expected success because of his previous knowledge. In this regard, this student passed the course and ascribed the *final exam* as the cause of success. Both attributions may be related since the final exam worth 70% of the grading criteria, hence, the previous knowledge of this participant could be an important factor for achieving that grading percentage.

5.6.6 Expectations of success and causal dimensions

This section discusses expectations of success (and failure) and their relation to causal dimensions in order to explain the changes concerning expectations.

Expectations of success portrayed participants' predictions about their future learning achievement and displayed attributions. Also, apart from expectations of success, there were participants who expected to fail the course. First, the reasons for expectations of success were: *the major was motivating*, *attitude to learn English*, *previous English knowledge*, and *easiness of the English course*. Hence, all of these causes are considered as internal, unstable and controllable, except for the last attribution, which is classified as internal, unstable and uncontrollable. Second, three reasons were identified for the expectations of failure: *poor English knowledge* (internal/unstable/controllable), *teachers grading criteria* (external/stable/uncontrollable) and *English course difficulty* (external/unstable/uncontrollable).

As previously mentioned, the stability dimension of attributions predicts persistence affecting future expectations and determines expectancy shifts (Weiner, 1985; Graham, 1991). In this regard, most of the causes of expectations of success and failure are described as unstable. Therefore, both expectations of future success and failure were susceptible to change or be wrong; as a result, four out of five participants who had expectations of success passed the English course. Interestingly, six out of nine participants who did not have expectations of success also passed the

course. This shows that negative expectations can also change during time and create positive outcomes.

As for the dimensions locus and controllability immerse in the attributions of expectations, they show diverse dimensional characteristics; most of the causes are internal and controllable, but there are also external and uncontrollable. In this sense, it is suggested that the expectations derived whether from personal beliefs or from external factors, moreover, the controllability dimension of these causes also varied and display how much control students had about their expectations.

In short, prior expectations of success and failure, similar to causal attributions, can be explained from the perceive of causal dimensions. Evidence showed that the attributions of participants' expectations can be used to predict how students might react the moment they confirm, or not, their expectations since it was shown that the causes were susceptible to change.

5.6.7 Expectations and final grades

As part of the second research question, an analysis concerning expectations and final grades is made here.

Findings suggest that three of the passing students who had high expectations of success passed the English course with grades higher than 8.0 points. However, six of the rest of passing students had low expectations and obtained high grades. As for average students, two of them had low expectations; in that respect, they passed the course with 7.00 and 7.20 as final grades. In addition, one average student, who had high expectations of success, also reached 7.20 as final grades. Finally, among the failing students, one had low expectations and other had high expectations. Consequently, both of them obtained failing final grades, that is, less than 7.00.

In short, findings show a disparity concerning initial expectations and actual results. On the one hand, eight of the participants considered as passing (including average students) had low expectations. On the other hand, high expectations were seen in both passing and failing participants. This means that students who fail the course had also high expectations. As seen in section 5.1.5, most of the expectations of success were prone to change over time since the attributional explanations were classified, in regard with causal dimensions, as internal, unstable and

controllable. Also, it is suggested that these changes of expectations can be explained as an academic adjustment (Smith and Wertlieb, 2005), which is also part of the transition process (Silva, 2011).

Finally, expectations of success can be seen from a motivational view. The existing literature explains that academic motivation can influence students' expectations (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Nilsen, 2009; Camacho, Barquero, Mariscal and Merino, 2012; Steinmann, Bosch and Aiassa, 2013). Despite the belief that positive expectations motivate students to work hard, this thesis suggests that the expectations of first-year students were not consistent, in most of the cases, with their final grades from the English course they attended.

Following the motivational perspective, participants could have experienced two situations: 1) they were exposed to some form of motivation that changed their low expectations, or 2) their initial high expectations changed because they were demotivated. Finally, it is likely that these students faced some sort of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation since results from this thesis showed motivational elements throughout the transition from high school to university, as it will be discussed in section 5.2.

5.6.8 Students' self-appraisal of success and final grades

This section discusses results of participants' perceptions of success and failure in order to explain the association with their final grades.

First, participants who perceived themselves as unsuccessful (except for participant F1) belonged to the categories failing and average students. Additionally, the majority of unsuccessful participants ascribed their beliefs to their low level of English.

Second, a total of eight participants identified themselves as successful; seven were passing students and one was a failing student. Findings show that being able to learn English was the most recurrent reason that participants associated with their own success.

Comparing with students' final grades, all responders (except for participants F1, P10 and P12) who considered themselves as unsuccessful were failing and average students, that is, they

obtained less than 7.9 as final grades. As for participants who considered themselves as successful, six participants were passing students, hence, their final grades ranged from 8.0 to 10.

In short, results showed that students' self-appraisal of success align with their final grades in most of the cases. These results are consistent with the ones by Garduño et al. (2016) who concluded that final grades are related to the self-appraisal of success (and failure) of first-year English language students.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This qualitative exploratory research was based on two research questions: 1) What are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning? 2) What are the first-year English language students' beliefs regarding causes of success or failure and expectations of success towards English language achievement? At the same time, these questions attempted to accomplish the main objective of the study: to describe the influence of causal attributions of first-year English language learners on their achievement and expectations of success that emerged from their transition from high school to university.

Face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions were applied to seventeen English learners from the second semester of *Lengua Inglesa* at the University of Quintana Roo. The instrument of this research was based on participants' attributions of success and failure and their perceptions regarding the transition stages by Tinto (1989) and the unfamiliar conditions by Perry (2003). Also, as part of the attributional examination, students were asked about their perceived success. Finally, two categories emerged and were labeled as Probability of failure and New learning environment. Therefore, findings displayed a variety of attributional categories as well as diverse academic and social elements of the transition. In addition, these factors were shown as a highly influence for students' English learning achievement.

6.1 Conclusions

In regard with the first research question (what are the causal attributions of first-year English language students associated to their transition from high school to university towards English language learning?) findings presented a variety of academic and social elements as well as causal attributions that exposed participants' explanations for each category. Concerning the categories from both stages of the transition and the rest of the academic and social elements, results demonstrated that these factors influenced in some way the learning language achievement of participants. First, some of the expectations of the university and the major were described as unrealistic since students could not fulfill them once they enrolled. As a result, students were able to form images and opinions of what the university and the major *Lengua Inglesa* would be like based on factors such as the good or bad quality of the university or external perspectives from family and friends. The negative outcome emerged when some participants' positive expectations about the major changed to negative. Despite this, it did not have a direct influence on all participants' learning achievement, but some students were concerned and worried about what they were experiencing.

Second, the major selection process influenced positively to the learning language achievement of thirteen students; consequently, it was found that all students who selected *Lengua Inglesa* as a second choice claimed to have experienced a positive influence from this major.

Next, the four unfamiliar conditions displayed here influenced both positively and negatively. It should be noted that the unfamiliar conditions are originally categorized as negative elements since they affect achievement motivation, goal striving and persistence (Perry, 2003). Nevertheless, this thesis showed that the unfamiliar conditions did not entirely influenced students in a negative way.

As for the increased pressure to excel, both internal and external pressure were mostly described as motivation which influenced positively students' learning process.

Then, teachers played a significant role for the participants learning achievement; on the one hand, teachers' methodologies were generally seen as adequate. On the other hand, the influence of the grading criteria of teachers were categorized as negative (participants were concerned about how they were being graded) and positive (participants agreed that the grading criteria were beneficial).

Furthermore, most of the students claimed that their classmates provided a positive effect for their learning achievement since classmates were an important part for their English learning process because they functioned as assistance for their learning.

Finally, the emerging categories showed a great influence; on the one hand, the probability of failure experienced by participants proved that it could be a predictor for students' negative learning achievement. On the other hand, some participants agreed that they sensed a new form of responsibility along with unexperienced academic autonomy and independence. These elements were found during the participants' transition from high school to university, specifically, when they were in the process of discovering the new learning environments.

As for the second research question (what are the first-year English language students' beliefs regarding causes of success or failure and expectations of success towards English language achievement?) findings showed a variety of causal attributions; the most representative attribution of failure was: *not delivering assignments*, and for attributions of success: *the teacher* and *the final exam*. Additional attributions included: *effort*, *lack of effort*, *the major curriculum* and *lack of English knowledge*. Interestingly, average students (participants who passed the course with less than 8.0 points), provided attributions of failure (*not delivering assignments*, *lack of effort*, *the final exam*), instead of causes of success. Also, they classified themselves as unsuccessful. These results suggest that students who passed the course with what is considered as low final grades were more inclined to believe they were unsuccessful and, in consequence, had attributions of failure.

Following this, the taxonomy of causal dimensions was seen as essential to understanding the nature of attributions of success and failure since it showed learners' past and present academic situations. Then, the resulting causal attributions varied in regard with the causality dimensions; the most recurrent classification was internal, unstable and controllable attributions. Thus, internal and controllable causes, like *not delivering assignments*, show that participants were aware of their own responsibilities and blame themselves for their results. Also, unstable causal attributions indicate that they could change in future academic settings and that it is participants' decisions and their will to execute this shift. Internal and controllable attributions also showed participants' responsibility and control on their own learning.

In order to understand more about attributions, the second research question also considered students' expectations of success that were exposed as predictors for students' learning performance. As a result, the initial expectations of participants were mostly negative; thus, students

predicting their failure concerned their poor English knowledge, course difficulty and the teachers' grading criteria. In contrast, expectations of success were related to causes concerning the major and the course (*motivated by the major and the course seemed easy*). In this sense, it was suggested that these expectations changed during the transition because of motivational factors.

Further, it was found that high and low expectations of success changed during the second stage of the transition. In addition, the locus, stability and controllability of the causes of expectations displayed them as unpredictable and changeable. Following this, a comparison was made between expectations and final grades; it was found that final results were inconsistent in relation to initial expectations of success and failure. Again, this is linked to expectations and their shifting characteristics, which conclude that motivational elements were part of the process of adjusting to expectations.

On the whole, this thesis found that the connection of academic and social elements of the transition from high school to university with attributions of success and failure showed that students' learning achievement could have been influenced by these transition elements. The causal attributions for final grades *the teacher, (not) delivering assignments, the final exam, lack of English knowledge, and the major curriculum* are highly linked to the following elements of university transition: major selection, teachers' methodologies, teachers' grading criteria, external pressure to excel, probability of failure, and expectations of success. These categories, found during the two stages of transition, prove that they could have influenced participants' beliefs of their own English learning achievement that emerged during their first semester.

In short, findings from this thesis showed that the academic elements, seen also as causal attributions, that were found during the transition from high school to university, influenced first-year participants' learning process affecting their beliefs about their attributions of success or failure and, especially, molding their motivations and expectations as well as their language learning achievement.

6.2 Limitations

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. First, the sample size was limited since this thesis required only first-year English university students from the *Lengua Inglesa* major and, in consequence, the number of students was little. Therefore, the small population used for this research make it difficult to expose a general view of the problem that was initially proposed.

Second, the majority of the available research focuses on foreign settings and a very small number of studies provide similar material to this study.

Finally, the sphere of academic contexts is different between countries. In this sense, more research about causal attributions and the transition from high school to university should be conducted in Mexican universities.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations concern some of the categories analyzed in this thesis research that may require more attention in future research.

First, prior expectations about the university and the major should focus not only on students' opinions about the institutions they are about to enroll, but on *how* they manage their expectations during their transitions. In this perspective, it is believed that expectations could be useful predictors for learners' future learning achievement (Smith and Wertlieb, 2005); consequently, studies about prior expectations should consider a longitudinal view.

Second, this study presented solely students' reasons for enrolling in the major as a second choice, hence, this category might be improved by exploring why students selected *Lengua Inglesa* as their first choice. In addition, it is recommended that future research should analyze students' desires, likes and dislikes regarding the major they would enroll in order to increase their expectations of language learning (Sullivan, 2016).

Next, opinions about the increasing pressure to excel on the classroom could be enhanced with the motivation theory by Gardner (1985) in order to explore a wider spectrum of students' academic desires and inspirations concerning forms of academic pressure to succeed. The rest of the unfamiliar conditions that were found related to motivation (teachers' methodologies, stringent grading practices and classmates) are not enough explored in the English language learning field as elements of transition, so they should be studied individually in order to generate further conclusions.

Then, attributions of success and failure could be explored solely from the perspective of students' transitions from high school to university in order to generate causes of success and failure which may be related to the transition itself. At the same time, the majority of literature about causal attributions in ELL explores only successful and failure students. This thesis presented three classifications: *failing*, *average* and *passing students*. These participants were able to provide interesting views concerning their own learning achievement in relation to causal attributions. Therefore, future research about attributions in ELL should consider including the beliefs of those who are borderline students. As revealed in this thesis, average students considered themselves as not

successful and treated their attributions as attributions of failure. Finally, future research should consider longitudinal studies in order to observe how attributions change over time.

Equally important, the current study focused on participants' expectations of success regarding the English course they attended. In future studies, it should be considered the issue of expectation of success in the transition process since it could be beneficial when it comes to students learning motivation. Wen (1977) asserts that students can predict their outcomes and make conscious choices in order to obtain their expectations. Hence, exploring students' expectations of success and elicit them to be aware of their own language learning process can easily influence their motivation and, eventually, be successful.

Moreover, despite the issue of the *new learning environment* in the University of Quintana Roo was identified, little information was gathered regarding its influence on students' learning language achievement. Future research should focus on this problem and identify not only the diverse new learning settings, but on the effects that they may have on students' language learning. Additionally, this is a topic that is highly related to the effects of university settings on students' learning performance that concern physical and psychological problems such as anxiety (Gomathi, Ahmed, and Sreedharan, 2012; Barquín, García, and Ruggero, 2013), stress (Hicks and Heastie, 2008; Rull et al., 2011), depression (Vélez, Gutiérrez, and Isaza, 2010), suicidal thoughts (Osnaya, Romo, and Pérez, 2011) as well as several health issues related to a tendency to consume drugs (Antúnez and Vinet, 2013; Castillo et al., 2015). In consequence, this category can generate extensive results if it is properly applied on Mexican academic contexts, specifically, on first-year university students.

In conclusion, future research about university transition on ELL contexts can be improved by developing research instruments based on the categories that were discussed in this thesis and on other issues that could enrich the university transition problem such as adaptation difficulties (Sharma, 2012; Pérez, 2015) or desertion (Tinto, 1989; Silva, 2011). Finally, since the transition from high school to university is seen as a crucial and inevitable experience, it is imperative to develop studies concerning not only causal attributions and unfamiliar conditions, but also a great number of academic, social and psychological elements that could influence students in diverse ways the moment they finish high school and decide to begin their journey to university.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

| ETAPA DE TRANSICIÓN/CATEGORÍA | PREGUNTAS |
|---|---|
| PRIMERA ETAPA: EXPECTATIVAS Y OPINIONES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD Y DE LA CARRERA | 1. ¿CUÁL ERA TU OPINIÓN DE LA UNIVER- SIDAD ANTES DE INGRESAR? 2. ¿CUÁL ERA TU OPINIÓN DE LA CARRERA DE LENGUA INGLESA ANTES DE INGRESAR? |
| PRIMERA ETAPA: ELECCIÓN DE CARRERA | 3. ¿POR QUÉ ELIGISTE LA CARRERA DE LENGUA INGLESA? 4. ¿FUE TU PRIMERA OPCIÓN? 5. ¿INFLUYÓ ESA DECISIÓN EN TU APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS? |
| PRIMERA ETAPA: EXPECTATIVAS DEL CURSO DE INGLÉS 1 | 6. ¿CÓMO CREISTE QUE TE IRÍA EN EL CURSO DE INGLÉS 1? |
| SEGUNDA ETAPA: EXPECTATIVAS DESPUÉS DE INGRESAR | 7. ¿CUÁL FUE TU OPINIÓN DE LA UNIVERSIDAD AL MOMENTO DE INGRESAR? 8. ¿CUÁL FUE TU OPINIÓN DE LA CARRERA AL MOMENTO DE INGRESAR? |
| CATEGORÍA: AUTOVALORACIÓN DE ÉXITO | 9. ¿TE CONSIDERASTE COMO UN ESTUDIANTE EXITOSO DE INGLÉS EN EL PRIMER SEMESTRE? 10. ¿POR QUÉ? |
| CATEGORÍA: ATRIBUCIONES CAUSALES | 11. ¿A QUÉ LE ATRIBUYES TU PROMEDIO FINAL DE INGLÉS 1? |
| CATEGORÍA: UNFAMILIAR CONDITIONS (PRESIÓN PARA SOBRESALIR) | 12. ¿SENTISTE QUE HUBO ALGÚN TIPO DE PRESIÓN QUE TE OBLIGÓ A SER EXI- TOSO EN LA MATERIA DE INGLÉS 1? 13. ¿CÓMO AFECTÓ ESA PRESIÓN EN TU APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS? |
| CATEGORÍA: UNFAMILIAR CONDITIONS (METODOLOGÍAS DE ENSEÑANZA DEL MAESTRO) | 14. ¿CÓMO ENSEÑABA TU MAESTRO? 15. ¿CÓMO INFLUYERON LAS FORMAS DE ENSEÑANZA EN TU APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS? |
| CATEGORÍA: UNFAMILIAR CONDITIONS (SISTEMA DE CALIFICACIÓN DEL MAESTRO) | 16. ¿CÓMO ERA LA FORMA DE CALIFICAR DEL MAESTRO? 17. ¿QUÉ TAN RIGUROSO FUE SU FORMA DE CALIFICAR? |

| | |
|--|--|
| | 18. ¿CÓMO INFLUYÓ EN TU APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS? |
| CATEGORÍA: UNFAMILIAR CONDITIONS (COMPAÑEROS DE CLASE) | 19. ¿CÓMO TE SENTÍAS RESPECTO A TUS NUEVOS COMPAÑEROS DEL SALÓN DE INGLÉS 1? 20. ¿CÓMO INFLUYERON LOS COMPAÑEROS EN TU APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS? |
| CATEGORÍA: UNFAMILIAR CONDITIONS (MAYOR PROBABILIDAD DE REPROBAR) | 21. ¿CONSIDERAS QUE AQUÍ (EN LA UNIVERSIDAD) TENÍAS MÁS PROBABILIDAD DE REPROBAR O DE OBTENER BAJAS CALIFICACIONES? 22. ¿POR QUÉ? 23. ¿CÓMO AFECTA ESTO EN TU APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS? |

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT



UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO
DIVISIÓN DE DESARROLLO SUSTENTABLE
DESARROLLO DE COMPETENCIAS BÁSICAS

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, a ____ de _____ del 2019

HOJA DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Título de la investigación: “The influence of transition from high school to university on first year ELL college students: success and failure attributions.”

Fase: Entrevista

Tesista: Br. Gabriel Zapata Cimé

Supervisor de tesis: Prof. Mizael Garduño Buenfil

*Indique con una **equis (x)** dentro de los cuadros si está de acuerdo con lo siguiente:*

He tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre la investigación.

Estoy de acuerdo en ser parte de este proyecto de investigación, y autorizo que se usen los datos que yo genere para el propósito de este estudio.

Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que, en caso de ya no querer participar en este proyecto, lo podré hacer cuando desee sin que esto me afecte legalmente.

Protección de los datos

Entiendo que la información recabada sobre mi persona durante mi participación en este estudio se usará únicamente para los propósitos y objetivos de este estudio. Toda la documentación que contenga cualquier información personal se deberá usar de forma anónima.

Nombre del participante:

Firma del participante:

Fecha:

Avenida Andrés Quintana Roo s/n, esq. calle 110 Sur. Col. Maravilla, C.P. 77600. Cozumel, Quintana Roo, México. Teléfono (987)

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