

"What's the Point of Learning Syntax?" Students' Motivation to Learn Syntax and Their Understanding of Its Functionality

In é Lucas-Oliva

University Pablo de Olavide, Spain;

University of Seville, Seville, Spain

Nicol ás Vizca ño-Grau

University of Seville, Seville, Spain

Abstract—Understanding the structure of our mother tongue is essential for many reasons. Therefore, the study of syntax is one of the fundamental contents of language classes in Secondary Education in Spain. However, the motivation and interest that students show towards it is often lacking. The aim of this study is twofold: 1) to describe teachers' and students' perceptions of the teaching of syntax in the Spanish Language and Literature class, and 2) to assess which factors may have an impact on learning success. For this purpose, a mixed quantitative-qualitative research design is used. The responses of students and teachers of Secondary Education and Pre-university Education collected by means of different types of surveys are analysed. The results show a widespread concern for the motivational factor, a diversity of opinions and general agreement with the methodology applied. However, a significant proportion of the student sample is unaware of the usefulness of learning syntactic content. Traditional methodologies continue to prevail in the classrooms studied, although innovative methodologies are related to more motivated students. A significant link is observed between motivation, teaching methodology and understanding of the functionality of syntax. Limitations of the study are commented upon, and theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Index Terms—syntax, motivation, languages, teaching methods, educational innovations

I. INTRODUCTION

Syntactic analysis is an essential content of the subject of Spanish Language and Literature in the classrooms of Spanish schools according to the official curricula for Secondary Education and Pre-university Education (hereinafter referred to as Secondary Education) in Spain. The understanding of syntax is key, as it is directly linked to multiple pragmalinguistic aspects (Mondal, 2022) included as content in the subject. Despite this, it is perceived that students continue to doubt the usefulness of syntax during the teaching and learning process (Montol í 2020), due to a traditional teaching of syntax. This has been characterized by being based on the transmission of information from the teacher to the student, disregarding the interests, motivation, and level of the students (Fontich, 2021; Us ó Vicedo, 2014).

As a discipline integrated within grammar -and in charge of analyzing and explaining the ways in which words are joined to form phrases or sentences with a certain meaning (Ravid & Schiff, 2021; Aguilar, 2020), syntax is based on the structures of compositional logic and the principles and rules of language (Cano, 2019; Valencia & Pretel, 2016). Together with morphology -with which it forms morphosyntax- it is responsible for ensuring that speech acts maintain the necessary structure between utterances to express the desired meanings and to perform an adequate interpretation of them (Valencia & Pretel, 2016).

At school, grammar, and particularly syntax, is taught mainly through the explanation of morphosyntactic categories for their subsequent identification (Dickel, 2012) in unconnected and decontextualized sentences. The question "what is syntax for" is frequently asked by students. In this sense, some studies explain that it serves "the same purpose as a crossword puzzle or Sudoku. Fundamentally to think. To analyze the language is to do mental gymnastics in order to use it better, to write better, to express better, to understand better. In other words, to improve" (Grijelmo, 2021, p. 345). The approach to syntax from learning methodologies based on the presentation of theoretical concepts for students to memorize and apply (the most common in schools) causes rejection by students, who do not understand what learning this content brings, despite it being essential to achieve successful communication (Bosque & Gallego, 2016).

The most common syntax teaching methodologies consist of grammar instruction through the transmission of the contents by the teacher, while the student is limited to listening and reproducing the steps to be followed, without knowing how to properly apply the knowledge later in practice (Garc á-Folgado, 2022). In turn, the textbook as a teaching tool encourages this traditional methodology that does little to improve the student's comprehension and expressive skills since it is used as a routine element that is demotivating (Fern ández, 2012). Even though the curriculum proposes a more communicative approach to teaching, the traditional methodology is still in force in

classrooms (Usó Vicedo, 2014). Therefore, syntax should be worked on in relation to the four blocks in which the curriculum organises the contents for the subject of Spanish Language and Literature: Block 1. Oral Communication: listening and speaking, Block 2. Written communication: reading and writing, Block 3. Knowledge of Language, and Block 4. Literary education (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015).

In this regard, there are various proposals in the specialised literature which propose to integrate the study of syntax with comprehension and written production (Fontich, 2021; Valerio, 2017). Integrating syntactic content into literary content can be complex; however, including it in the reading of lyrical texts can come naturally and help both to facilitate the understanding of the texts and to practise and assimilate the strategies and concepts of syntactic analysis (Hernando, 2006; Hernando & Lluch, 2015). It is also possible to work on syntax in connection with written production. Some authors propose studying the functions of syntagms and how to combine them to give them a particular meaning through the writing process, rather than through traditional syntactic analysis, which is based on describing how others have combined these syntagms to communicate (Marín, 2007; Ochoa-Sierra, 2015). Another line of didactic research focusing on these aspects proposes creating workspaces that allow students to reflect on aspects of grammar, actively involving them in the teaching-learning processes (Bravo, 2018; García-Folgado, 2022; Rodríguez, 2012). This movement is known as "Didactic Sequences for learning grammar", and was initiated by the philologist and pedagogue Camps i Mundó (2006). Faced with the variety of methodological proposals, two opposing trends are identified: grammar instruction through the traditional and memoristic method, and active methodologies through technology and gamification (Montolí 2020). This last alternative for tackling the teaching-learning of syntax suggests that success lies in alternating and combining both methodological perspectives and valuing the effort and involvement of students to encourage their motivation.

It has been studied that including teaching innovation in the classroom and encouraging the use of new technologies increases student motivation (Lever-Duffy & McDonald, 2020; Lucas-Oliva et al., 2022). But this requires trained and up-to-date teachers, which means that change must start with teacher training (Torres & Rodríguez, 2018). Likewise, encouraging collaborative work and basing teaching on socio-affective strategies has a decisive influence on motivation (Chen, 2021; Lobo, 2007).

Motivation arises when students are committed to a goal and intrinsically desire to achieve it. This leads inevitably to a favourable attitude towards learning and towards the effort that this learning implies throughout the process to achieve the proposed goal (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2018; Usán & Salavera, 2018). Motivated students are more likely to obtain good academic results (Lucas-Oliva et al., 2022; Willis, 2021) and, in addition, their satisfaction with their attitude and learning will be higher (Sellán, 2017; Usán & Salavera, 2018). The relevance of motivation in learning is also reflected in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, developed by the Council of Europe (2002). Among its principles, it states that language teaching and learning should be based on learners' needs, motivation, and resources. In a classroom where students are motivated, learning will be more successful and successful learning is in turn motivating for teachers (Ansari et al., 2017; Arnold, 2006). If teachers are motivated and maintain a positive mindset towards their teaching, their students are much more likely to share this motivation and commitment to learning (Heller, 2018; Lucas-Oliva et al., 2021).

For all these reasons, the following research questions are posed in this study: how do teachers and students perceive the teaching of syntax in language classes in Spanish secondary school classrooms? Which aspects would have the greatest impact on students' learning? In order to answer these questions, a twofold objective is proposed:

Objective 1: to describe teachers' and students' perceptions of the teaching of syntax in the Spanish Language and Literature class.

Objective 2: to assess which factors - among those described on the teaching of syntax - may have an impact on learning success.

II. METHOD

A mixed quantitative-qualitative methodology was designed for this study. It is a descriptive, cross-sectional, non-experimental study, in which data is collected through surveys with closed and open questions in a single observation period. Two instruments are used with two groups of subjects - teachers and students - to collect data on the same aspects from both groups. In this way it is possible to triangulate the information. For the analysis of the quantitative data, the mean has been calculated, in order to know the average degree of agreement by group, and the standard deviation, in order to know if there is a disparity of answers within the total sample. The qualitative data were analysed by the two authors using a system of emergent categories in which the teachers' and students' responses were classified independently.

A. Population

Students and teachers of Spanish Language and Literature in Secondary Education from eight different Spanish schools participated in the survey. The sample consisted of a total of 324 subjects, 4.6% of whom were teachers (40% male and 60% female) and 95.4% pupils (41.4% male, 55.6% female and 3% identified with another sex).

The teachers who participated were on average 51 years old, with the youngest being 31 years old and the oldest 65 years old. Within the sample made up by the group of teachers, 33.3% belonged to School-1 (Seville); 26.6% to

School-2 (Alcalá de Guadalupe, Seville); 13.3% to School-3 (Seville); 6.6% to School-4 (Seville); 6.6% to School-4 (Seville); and 6.6% to School-5 (Torrent, Valencia). All schools are public, except for the last two, which are subsidised. Almost half of the respondents, 46.7%, have more than 25 years of teaching experience, 26.6% have between 16 and 25 years of experience, 20% have between 6 and 15 years of experience, and 6.7% have less than 5 years of teaching experience. The sample covers all years of Secondary Education (grades comprising students between 12 and 18 years of age).

The average age of the students who took part was 16, with the youngest being 12 years old and the oldest 20 years old. 86.08% of the respondents belong to School-1 (Seville), 7.44% belong to School-5 (Torrent, Valencia), 4.53% to School-6, and 1.94% to School-7 (Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Cádiz). All schools are public, except for School-5, which is subsidised. In terms of grades, 1.61% belong to 1st year of Secondary Education, 12.29% to 2nd year of Secondary Education, 24.27% to 3rd year of Secondary Education, 20.71% to 4th year of Secondary Education, 14.23% to 1st year of Pre-university Education and 26.86% to 2nd year of Pre-university Education. All subjects were informed of this research and signed their informed consent giving permission to the researchers to use their data in this study. The names of the schools have been coded to safeguard the anonymity of the participants.

B. Instruments

The data collection technique for this research was the survey. The instruments used were two questionnaires comprising three blocks and managed in a unified way by means of Google Forms. In them, the respondent began by selecting whether he/she was a teacher or a student, which diverted him/her to different models of questionnaires according to the selected profile. The first block was designed to collect socio-demographic and work/study-related data. Among other aspects, questions were asked about age, sex, the name of the school and whether it was a public, state-subsidised or private school. In addition, the teacher survey included a question on years of teaching experience, and on the classes and groups in which the subject is taught. Students were asked to answer which year group and class they attend.

The first exercise (first block of questions) is a questionnaire which seeks to collect data on teaching methodology in the teaching-learning of syntax and its effect on students. These are answered with 4-point Likert-type scales, where 1 means *do not agree at all*, 2 means *slightly agree*, 3 means *somewhat agree*, and 4 means *strongly agree*. The statements to react to are focused on the same issues but adapted to the profile of the target group: teachers or students. Teachers have 11 statements, while students have 10.

The second exercise (second block of questions) consists of four open questions asking for reflection on: 1. the usefulness of syntax, 2. the teaching methodology, 3. the shortcomings of teaching and 4. the positive aspects of teaching. All of them were to be answered in relation to their own experiences with the teaching/learning of syntax at the present time.

III. RESULTS

The results obtained are presented by referring firstly to the data of the total sample and differentiating each of the instruments used. Therefore, the results are shown separately for teachers on the one hand and for pupils on the other.

A. Teachers

The results of the descriptive statistics on the data from the first exercise corresponding to the group of teachers are presented below (see Table 1). As for items 6. *I make use of ICT for syntax lessons* and 11. *My students know that syntax is useful*, they show a mean tending towards disagreement ($M = 2.4$). However, both have a high standard deviation ($dt = >0.9$), so there is no clear consensus on these issues.

On the contrary, items 1. *I like teaching syntax in class*, 5. *I manage to motivate my students*, 7. *The sentences students analyse are selected by me*, 9. *The methodology I use I think is appropriate for students' learning* and 10. *I think syntax is useful*, show a mean ($M = >3$) in favour of these statements.

With regard to the latter, it is worth noting that it has a high standard deviation ($dt = >0.9$), while in the rest of the items the standard deviation is not significant ($dt = <0.75$). The rest of the items have a mean between 2.6 and 2.86 with a high standard deviation.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR TEACHERS' FIRST EXERCISE

Parameter	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I like to teach syntax in class.	2	4	3.733333333	0.59361684
2. I think my learners like the fact that syntax is taught in class.	1	4	2.666666667	0.723746864
3. My students understand and perform syntactic analysis correctly.	2	4	2.733333333	0.59361684
4. My students, in general, get good marks in syntax.	2	4	2.866666667	0.743223353
5. I manage to motivate my students in syntax classes.	2	4	3	0.65465367
6. I make use of ICT in syntax lessons.	1	4	2.4	1.05559733
7. The sentences analysed by the learners are selected by me.	2	4	3.466666667	0.74322335
8. I apply innovative teaching to explain syntax.	1	3	2.6	0.63245553
9. I find the methodology I use to be appropriate for student learning.	2	4	3.466666667	0.63994047
10. I think syntax is very useful.	1	4	3.133333333	0.91547542
11. My students know that syntax is useful.	1	4	2.4	0.91025899

The second exercise, answered qualitatively by means of open-ended questions, includes reflection on four items: 1. usefulness of syntax, 2. methodology implemented, 3. shortcomings in the teaching itself and 4. possible improvements for the teaching itself (see Tables 2 to 5). The results of the categorical system are presented separately below.

In the first item on the usefulness of syntax (see Table 2), three emerging categories were identified. The first category, the most significant (46%), contains opinions arguing that syntax helps to organise the mind. A representative quote explains that "syntax is fundamental for shaping abstract thinking, for deducing, inducing, arguing and counter-arguing. In short, for learning to think" (Subject 66). The second category brings together the responses that maintain that it is useful for learning languages and the third category, strongly related to the previous ones, gathers opinions indicating that syntax is useful for expressing oneself correctly, both orally or in writing.

TABLE 2
ITEM 1. USEFULNESS OF SYNTAX

Categories	Recurrence
1. Useful for organising thought.	46.6%
2. Useful for learning languages (L1 or L2/FL).	26.6%
3. Useful for expressing oneself correctly.	26.6%

The second item asks about the methodology implemented in the teaching of syntax. Three categories were also identified (see Table 3). The most representative, with a recurrence of 60%, is the implementation of a traditional methodology, through grammar instruction and practice with exercises. Significant is the quote from Subject 289, who states that the methodology he uses "is very traditional: marker pen and blackboard. Although the lecture is much reviled, I think it is very important to have a personalised and detailed explanation of the analysis. Students usually participate directly in the analysis. The timing depends on the level and the acquisition of this knowledge by the students". The second category, which includes mixed methodologies, has a recurrence of 26.6% and is described in a very representative way with the following quote: "I mix traditional methodologies (exposition) with that of discovery, through questions that favour the recognition of structures or relationships, as well as the practical method, with guided practices at the beginning and more autonomous, which require greater expertise from the student. Student participation is essential for learning syntax" (Subject 290). The third category includes other teaching practices, whether innovative or not, which cannot be classified in the previous categories.

TABLE 3
ITEM 2. TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Categories	Recurrence
1. Traditional methodology (grammar instruction): Lecture presentation and automatization through exercises.	60%
2. Mixed methodology of traditional teaching with gamification: lectures and automatization with gamified exercises.	26.6%
3. Other teaching practices - innovative or not - that cannot be classified in the previous categories.	13,3%

The third item includes reflections on the deficiencies found in their own teaching of syntax. Three categories were identified among the responses: 1. low level of students (59.9%), 2. deficient system and curriculum (26.6%) and 3. demotivation of students, because they do not know what the purpose of learning syntax is (13.3%). The first category is amply reflected in the quote from Subject 12, who states that students have "basic problems. Students have a very low level and it is very difficult for them to relate the concepts they are learning and those that have been taught before. They have to study and think". A quote that significantly represents category 2 explains that "it is essential to take into account the pace of learning, something that the curricular obligations and the university entrance exam do not always allow us to do. On the other hand, there are only a few teaching hours in the Secondary School, so it is not possible to devote all the time necessary" (Subject 66). Equally illustrative of category 3 is the quote from Subject 32: "they don't see the importance of syntax; they don't see its usefulness. I try to make them see that it is important for the comprehension and assimilation of texts, which takes me the whole course. At the end they seem to see some use for it".

TABLE 4
ITEM 3. TEACHING DEFICIENCIES

Categories	Recurrence
1. Low level of student knowledge.	59,9%
2. Deficient system and curriculum.	26,6%
3. Demotivation of students, due to their lack of knowledge about the purpose of learning syntax.	13,3%

The last item deals with the positive aspects of their own syntax teaching (see Table 5). Four categories were identified among the responses. The most recurrent opinion (73.3%) is that practice, review and a slower pace are highly beneficial. Illustrative of this category is the quote from Subject 323, who considers it positive to "explain things very slowly and give them [the students] the opportunity to make mistakes many times so they can correct them". The second category (13.3%) brings together responses that find the implementation of playful methodologies very positive, i.e. "the way of using what is explained in the methodology, including interactive games" (Subject 292). The third and fourth categories have a very low recurrence (both 6.6%) and are respectively related to putting the focus on the mastery of theoretical contents and fostering student motivation.

TABLE 5
ITEM 4. POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THE TEACHING

Categories	Recurrence
1. Include plenty of practice and review; keep a leisurely pace.	73.3%
2. Implement playful methodologies.	13,3%
3. Focus on mastery of theory.	6.6%
4. Motivate students.	6.6%

B. Students

The results of the descriptive statistics on the data from the first exercise, corresponding, on this occasion, to the group of students, are presented below (see Table 6). Of particular note are items 4. *The way my teacher teaches syntax is appropriate for my learning* and 7. *The sentences we analysed are decided by my teacher*, which show high agreement with the statements ($M = >3$) and a non-significant ($dv = 0.92$) and low ($dv = 0.64$) standard deviation, respectively. This implies a high degree of consensus among the respondents. On the contrary, a significant disagreement, with the highest standard deviation ($dv = 1.11$), is shown in relation to item 9. *I don't understand why it is studied and what syntax is for*, where the mean is *somewhat agree* ($M = >2$). Particularly noteworthy is the item "10. Knowing how to do syntactic analysis will help me in my professional future", as it is the statement with which the greatest disagreement has been shown ($M = <2$). However, the standard deviation, and therefore the divergence, is again significant ($dv = 0.96$). In the remaining items, an average degree of agreement/disagreement with the statements is maintained with a mean greater than 2 (slightly agree) and less than 3 (somewhat agree). Except for items 4 and 7, the standard deviation remains high ($dv = >0.95$) in all items, which shows a high discrepancy between respondents.

TABLE 6
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR STUDENTS' FIRST EXERCISE

Parameter	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I like to learn and practise syntax exercises.	1	4	2.475728155	0.965421584
2. I always do the syntactic analysis correctly.	1	4	2.55987055	0.860652114
3. I get good marks in syntax.	1	4	2.55987055	0.977244993
4. The way my teacher teaches syntax is appropriate for my learning.	1	4	3.213592233	0.925649847
5. My teacher manages to keep me attentive and motivated in his/her explanations of syntax.	1	4	2.825242718	1.020190819
6. I participate actively in syntax lessons, either by asking questions or by analysing sentences.	1	4	2.472491909	1.049143406
7. The sentences we analyse are decided by my teacher.	1	4	3.669902913	0.640439422
8. A different way of doing syntactic analysis would motivate me more.	1	4	2.420711974	1.083086384
9. I don't understand why syntax is studied nor what it is used for.	1	4	2.682847896	1.112092759
10. Knowing how to do syntactic analysis will help me in my professional future.	1	4	1.902912621	0.958704785

The second exercise of the student survey corresponds to the qualitative section, and addresses the same aspects included in the second exercise of the teacher survey. Therefore, the same four items are included. The responses were also analysed using a system of emerging categories.

Regarding item 1. Usefulness of syntax, seven categories have been identified (see Table 7). The most recurrent response (34.3%) is reflected in the first category and states that syntax is useless or of unknown use. This is reflected in the quote from Subject 58 when he/she expresses that "I sincerely believe that it is not good for much [...]. I don't see the need to study it in depth, they have never explained to me what it is for". The second category (31.38%) affirms that it is useful for expressing oneself correctly: "syntax allows us to know what we say, how we say it and how to say it correctly. [...] Unconsciously, knowing syntax and having practised it, helps us to produce more fluent and grammatically correct sentences" (Subject 322). Closely related to this, the third category (17.47%) includes responses which state that syntax serves to know and understand the language, that is, to "have culture and knowledge of the Spanish language" (Subject 204). The following categories are rather less frequent. The fourth category (8.08%) gathers opinions that understand that syntax will be a contribution for the world of work, and specifically to work in the arts.

The fifth category (6.79%) represents those who say that learning syntax is only useful to obtain a passing grade: "syntax is literally useful for getting the secondary school diploma and little else" (Subject 137). Finally, category 6. *To learn other languages* (1.29%) and category 7. *To do programming* (0.64%) were identified.

TABLE 7
ITEM 1. USEFULNESS OF SYNTAX

Categories	Recurrence
1. Syntax is useless or of unknown use.	34.3%
2. Syntax is used to express oneself correctly.	31.38%
3. Syntax serves to know and understand the language.	17.47%
4. Syntax is useful for a career in the arts and for the professional world.	8.08%
5. Syntax is only for passing grades.	6.79%
6. Syntax is useful for learning other languages.	1.29%
7. Syntax is helpful for programming.	0.64%

In the second item, on the methodology of teaching syntax, five categories are distinguished (see Table 8). The first one (50.8%) describes the methodology of grammar instruction, based on the lecture of theoretical contents and the subsequent practice of these contents through exercises of sentence analysis. As an example of this category, it is worth mentioning the quote from Subject 100, who explains that the methodology implemented by his teacher is "the traditional way, my teacher explains the sentences and then the students go out and do examples on the chalk board". The second category (32.36%) includes those respondents who simply gave a positive assessment of their teacher's methodology, regardless of whether it is a traditional methodology or not. The third category (7.44%) represents the opinions that claim to receive an innovative methodology: "[my teacher] uses the blackboard, the projector and telematic resources. He asks us to think about syntax and to do quick online tests on syntactic questions" (Subject 90). With a very close recurrence (7.11%), the fourth category includes the responses that maintain a negative perception of the methodology received in their syntax classes. Finally, the fifth category (2.26%) includes those who do not know or do not answer. In relation to the fourth category, the following quote on teaching methodology is illustrative:

To be honest, it is quite deficient in my opinion. She wants us to learn everything on our own and then ask questions in class, which would be fine if it weren't for the fact that every time we ask a question, which she thinks we should know, she seems annoyed and leaves us a bit embarrassed. Therefore, our class is afraid to ask questions and, as nobody asks, she takes everything for granted and moves on, which leads to the class being too embarrassed to ask questions and we are left with a lot of doubts. (Subject 312)

TABLE 8
ITEM 2. TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Categories	Recurrence
1. Master class and sentence analysis.	50.8%
2. Good methodology.	32.36%
3. Innovative methodology.	7.44%
4. Bad methodology.	7.11%
5. Don't know or don't respond.	2.26%

With regard to the third item, related to the deficiencies perceived by the students in the language classes in which syntax is taught, four categories were distinguished (see Table 9). The first category is the most recurrent (40.76%) and brings together the responses which expressed that the deficiencies in the classes are related to the demotivation generated by studying something which is of no use, in boring classes and/or with a bad classroom atmosphere. This category comprises quotes such as that of Subject 146, who states that studying syntax is "making us study very difficult things that we are not going to use in our lives. It's not even [...] general culture, [...] it's not even useful. [...] Knowing what a verb is and so on, for some situations is useful, but having to analyse a sentence is not" or the quote from Subject 215, who believes that "what doesn't work is the little use we see in syntax and, when we ask what it's for, they don't know how to respond, as it seems that even they don't see the utility of it in the future. Not seeing the usefulness of what we do makes us lose interest". The second category (27.82%) is linked to methodology, especially to teaching too much theory, having a very fast pace and having to adapt each year to the methodological changes proposed by each new teacher. This is expressed by Subject 126, who explains that "syntax does not work because for us, the students, it is very hard to learn so much theory, the endless new rules [...], the time we have to invest in it...". The third category (19.41%) includes opinions which describe satisfaction with their classes and consider that there are no deficiencies: "for me it works, because I've gone from knowing nothing to knowing how to analyse a simple sentence, so I think there's nothing that doesn't work" (Subject 157). Finally, the fourth category (11.97%) represents those who do not know or do not answer.

TABLE 9
ITEM 3. TEACHING DEFICIENCIES

Categories	Recurrence
1. Demotivation: pointlessness of learning syntax, boring classes and/or bad classroom climate.	40.76%
2. Methodological deficiencies: Too much theory, fast pace, changing method.	27.82%
3. Classes work. No deficiencies.	19.41%
4. Don't know or don't respond.	11.97%

The fourth item, which asked about the positive aspects perceived in the teaching received in classes on syntax, is broken down into seven categories (see Table 10). They are described, as before, in order of highest to lowest recurrence. The first category (21.42%) includes those respondents who rated the motivational factor as the most positive aspect of the teaching received during syntax classes. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the quote from Subject 75 in which he states that his teacher "explains by creating a good atmosphere, which keeps us focused and, at the same time, when we least expect it, can get a laugh out of us". The second category (18.79%) corresponds to those who have found nothing, or almost nothing, positive in the teaching. This is illustrated by the quote from Subject 307 in which he comments that "I would like to say that I like some of it, but I would be lying if I did, I don't find any motivation for it". The next four categories are related to methodology. The third category (14.28%) rated methodological aspects positively in general, such as the resources used or the way the class is taught. The fourth category (13.53%) represents those who considered clear and accessible explanations to be the most remarkable aspect of the teaching. This is illustrated by the words of Subject 74, who values his teacher's approach positively because "he explains in a way that is close to the student, i.e. using colloquial language". The fifth category (9.77%) brings together the responses which positively valued collaborative work and the constant and active participation of students: "I like it when they are done in pairs, because there are things you don't know, and you can get help from your classmates" (Subject 164). The sixth category, the last one related to methodology (6.76%), represents those who state that doing a lot of exercises and practising a lot is the most positive aspect of the classes "because it is the way to understand syntax" (Subject 312). Lastly, the seventh category (3.75%) represents those who did not know or did not respond.

TABLE 10
ITEM 4. POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THE TEACHING

Categories	Recurrence
1. Motivation: pleasant classes and good atmosphere.	21,42%
2. Nothing or almost nothing positive.	18,79%
3. Appropriate methodology.	14,28%
4. Clear and accessible explanations.	13,53%
5. Working collaboratively.	9,77%
6. Practice a lot, do a lot of exercises.	6,76%
7. Don't know or don't respond.	3,75%

IV. DISCUSSION

The results show that teachers and learners agree that motivation is an important matter of concern, that the methodology used is correct, that the sentences they analyse syntactically are chosen by the teachers and that the teaching is mostly traditional, based on lectures at the blackboard with theoretical explanations of grammar and subsequent practice of exercises. This implies that both groups assume that it is necessary to work from knowledge of metalinguistic concepts (van Rijt et al., 2022). They explain that the teaching is not particularly innovative. On this last point, however, there is a great disparity of opinions in both groups, which would reflect the fact that some teachers include innovation and ICT in their classes, while others, with a more significant recurrence, stick to traditional teaching. It is striking that students, although with a wide range of opinions, agree to some extent that *it would motivate them to do parsing in a different way to the current one*. This, together with the high degree of demotivation expressed, represents a contradiction in relation to the assumption that the current methodology is the correct one. This contradiction could be due to the lack of exposure of students to innovative methodological models that allow them to understand alternative teaching methods to the traditional one.

Once again, there is a concordance of opinions between students and teachers in the questions relating to the correct performance of syntactic analysis and good marks, the average being 2.55 for students in both questions, and a few tenths of a point higher for teachers. This allows us to assume that students generally have an acceptable knowledge of syntax.

In the different items analysed, there was a high recurrence of categories related to motivation. It is observed that teachers do not lack motivation in their teaching of syntax, as they state that they enjoy their classes. However, this is not the case for students. The drop of more than one point in motivation among learners is reflected both in the students' responses to the first exercise and in the 40.76% of responses regarding the third item of the second exercise that find demotivation as the greatest deficiency in the teaching received. This coincides with the teachers' perception on the subject; however, the diversity of opinions is high, i.e., it is not a generalised opinion. This plurality of opinions may be related to the variety of methodologies implemented and the different perceptions students have of them. It has been found that students who have a positive view of the methodology are more motivated:

I like the active participation of the students and the fluency of the class. I personally like the fact that the sentences analysed were not isolated sentences taken from an exercise, but came from texts, books or conversations with a real context that helped us to better understand what is being done (Subject 176).

It is significant that teachers *somewhat agree* that syntax is useful (with an average of 3.13), almost one point away from *strongly agreeing* with this statement. While teachers argue that it is useful for structuring the mind, for expressing oneself correctly and for learning other languages, in agreement with van Rijt et al. (2022), students claim that they are unaware of its usefulness and that syntax will be of no use to them: "[...] I have never needed it and I don't think I will need to know about it in the future" (Subject 226). It is possible that some teachers are unconsciously conveying some distrust towards the usefulness and relevance of learning syntax or that they are not spending enough time on communicating the functionality of syntax.

This is justified by the low coincidence between the recurrence and the categories identified in the teachers' and students' responses on this issue. The results obtained from the students in this respect agree with the study by Marín (2007), which explains that students only see grammar as useful in the context of school. This is reflected in the statements of Subject 27: "it is only useful to help your children in the future with their studies" or Subject 37: "it is only useful to pass Language". It is important for learners to find meaning in what they do, to have clear objectives and to see their progress towards achieving them, since it has been studied that in this way motivation will be higher and learning will be more effective (Willis, 2021). The category according to which learners affirm that syntax is useful for programming is striking, although its recurrence is not significant. This statement could attract the attention and motivation of pupils, especially those who are not naturally attracted to linguistic subjects.

Of particular significance is the teachers' response to the request to identify deficiencies in their teaching. Here, the three emerging categories define deficiencies related either to the student body or to the system, but none of the responses identify deficiencies in their own teaching. One possible explanation for this could be a lack of self-criticism on the part of the teaching staff, who are not taking any responsibility for the difficulties encountered in their classes. From the students' perspective, the greatest deficiency would be their own lack of motivation for these classes, because "learning syntax is of no use" (Subject 47), "the classes are boring" (Subject 21) and "the class atmosphere is sometimes spoiled" (Subject 50). While this is in line with the teachers' perception, which blames the difficulties on the low level and lack of motivation of the students, it seems appropriate to consider that teachers have a significant degree of responsibility for classroom management and the design and implementation of methodologies that foster motivation (Midby et al., 2020).

When reflecting on the positive aspects of teaching, both teachers and students coincide in positively valuing aspects such as practice and motivation, although with a significant difference in recurrence. While for teachers the most relevant aspect is practice, for students it is only 6.76%. Conversely, the aspect most highly valued by students is having motivating classes, an aspect mentioned by teachers in only 6.6% of the responses. This cross vision of what is positive in teaching could be the cause of the low satisfaction shown by both groups reciprocally. Aligning the interests and expectations of teachers and students could help to define the most appropriate methodology for each course, thus achieving more satisfactory classes for both groups and, consequently, deeper, and more meaningful learning (Lucas-Oliva et al., 2022).

V. CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained have made it possible to answer the research questions and satisfy the two proposed objectives. In relation to the first objective, it has been possible to offer a description, triangulated by the dual teacher-learner perspective, of the most relevant aspects of the teaching of syntax. In this respect, two factors stand out in particular: a predominant tendency towards master classes accompanied by practice with exercises, and a high level of student demotivation. In the second objective, we set out to assess which of the factors described above in the teaching of syntax may have an impact on the motivational factor and, therefore, on the success of learning. We observed a significant link between the lack of understanding of the usefulness of syntax and the motivational factor. Demotivation was very high and the references to not understanding the usefulness of syntax were very recurrent. Moreover, it was striking that teachers were not absolutely convinced of the usefulness and relevance of teaching syntax, which probably also influences students' perception of their learning and motivation. There is also a relationship between higher motivation and methodologies in which the teacher encourages active student participation and collaborative learning.

Nevertheless, both teachers and learners consider that the methodology implemented - mainly through grammar instruction - is adequate and, at the same time, a significant sample of students consider that other methodologies could be more motivating than the ones they currently receive. It seems necessary to show students other ways of teaching and learning which will attract their interest and make them understand that the most appropriate way of teaching does not have to be demotivating.

Another very significant aspect was the teachers' assessment of their teaching deficiencies. They consider that these deficiencies are caused by the low level and motivation of students and by the demands of the education system. It seems necessary to invite teachers to be self-critical. It is important to reflect on what we, as teachers, can do better to promote student learning. If we neglect this key aspect of the teacher's role, addressing shortcomings and seeking improvements will be very complex or even unattainable.

This study has made it possible to understand and describe certain aspects of the teaching of syntax in various Spanish schools. However, it has several limitations. Future studies could collect a larger and more varied sample, control for certain variables and establish correlations between teachers and students in the same school. Future complementary research could also propose and analyse methodological proposals for the teaching of syntax that are motivating for students.

In conclusion, this study responds to the objectives set and discusses theoretical and practical implications on the teaching of syntax in Secondary Education. We must continue to focus on active methodologies that motivate and empower students. To this end, it is essential to involve them in their learning by offering them explanations that lead them to understand the importance of what they are doing.

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Inés Lucas-Oliva is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher for the European competitive program "NextGenerationEU", in the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan and for the Spanish Ministry of Universities in the framework of the Margarita Salas grants for the Requalification of the Spanish university system, awarded by the Pablo de Olavide University, Seville. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics, and her line of research focuses on the study of language teaching and learning (L1 and SL/FL) in which she unifies educational, neuroscientific, and linguistic perspectives. She is a member of the Research Group of the University of Seville HUM1044: "Literacies" and is also a researcher in several R+D+i, University innovation, and cooperation projects. Prior to her current position, she was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Language and Literature Teaching in the Faculty of Education Sciences at the University of Seville. She has taught in faculties of Education, Philology, Translation and Language Sciences and in universities in Spain, Chile, and the United States. She is an accredited examiner for the DELE certificates of the Instituto Cervantes and has collaborated as a linguistic evaluator in the Fulbright Program in the U.S.A.

Nicolás Vizcaíno-Grau is currently working as a primary school teacher in a subsidised school in Seville (Spain). Previously, he has worked as a teacher of therapeutic pedagogy and as a teacher in specific classrooms with students on the autistic spectrum. He has a degree from the University of Seville, as a special education teacher, and holds the DECA certification (Ecclesiastical

Declaration of Sufficiency as a Teacher of Religion). He is involved in teaching innovation projects and has developed Service-Learning Methodology (SL) projects. He is recognised by the University of Nebrija (Madrid) for his training on Education and Gender, and on the use of social networks in the classroom.