THE NEED OF INTEGRATING THE FOUR SKILLS AND THE CURRENT

ALTERNATIVES IN ASSESSMENT IN EFL SETTINGS

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of Human Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of B.A.

in the English and French program

University of Nariño

June, 2012.

CURRENT METHODOLOGICAL TRENDS

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San Juan de Pasto, Junio del 2012

Este Trabajo de Investigación se ha realizado gracias, en primer lugar a Dios por guiarme en cada paso. En segundo lugar gracias a mi familia que aunque lejos siempre estuvieron apoyándome, en tercer lugar, quiero dar gracias a mi novia quien con paciencia, consejos y respaldo estuvo siempre conmigo. Desde mi corazón muchas gracias a todos.

CURRENT METHODOLOGICAL TRENDS

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Resumen

Este documento de investigación presenta ideas que argumentan la integración de las cuatro habilidades (Hablar, escuchar, leer y escribir) y la implementación de alternativas de evaluación actuales dentro del proceso de enseñanza en Colombia. Además, este documento contiene un análisis del contexto colombiano, lo que permite mencionar algunos de las razones que justifican la implementación de estas dos tendencias. Al mismo tiempo, se describen las posibles dificultades y potencialidades que se encontrarían al momento de aplicarlas en Colombia. Adicionalmente, presenta algunas de las estrategias que pueden ser utilizadas con el fin de implementar estas tendencias metodológicas en Colombia.

Abstract

This research paper presents some ideas that justify the integration of the four skills (Speaking, listening, reading and writing) and the implementation of the current alternatives in assessment in the teaching process in Colombia. Besides, this paper contains an analysis of the Colombian context which makes possible to mention some of the reasons that validate the implementation of these two trends. At the same time, some possible difficulties and potentialities found at the moment of applying them in Colombia are analyzed. In addition, some strategies that can be used in order to facilitate the implementation of these two methodological trends in Colombia are described.

THE NEED OF INTEGRATING THE FOUR SKILLS AND THE CURRENT ALTERNATIVES IN ASSESSMENT IN EFL SETTINGS

When teaching English as a second language (L2), teachers must consider some principles regarding the teaching and the assessment process. Then, it is crucial to consider the recent important events that have taken place in the field of Second Language acquisition which are mentioned by Hinkel (2006) (a) the encouragement to the implementation of approaches instead of methods, (b) the new alternatives in assessment, and (c) the need of teaching the four skills as a whole. It is possible to suggest that effectively by integrating the four skills and implementing alternatives to assess in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings there will be an improvement on the quality and effectiveness of the English courses. But, what happens in Colombia? Taking into account the Colombian setting, it is easy to notice that there seems to be a huge void when adapting new approaches. The proposals above mentioned could replace traditional methods and could help to overcome old problems, such as class size and discipline difficulties related to classroom management, as it is mentioned by Sánchez & Obando (2008), '…approaches such as content-based instruction, communicative language teaching or competency-based language teaching are needed in Colombian classrooms… whether we just want to enhance foreign language teaching in this country at all levels.'. Current approaches would lead teachers to implement some strategies inside the classroom for integrating the four skills and also, some current alternatives to asses, as a necessary element in their syllabi which would help to modify and improve the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in Colombia.

Here is where the importance of this paper resides. The current teachers' and learners' needs, regarding the Colombian setting, are strongly related to the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives in assessment but, the problem is that an important number of teachers do not consider them as a useful tool. Maybe, it is because they ignore the

importance of the current methodological trends and the alternatives to assess. But also, they do not realize the advantages provided by them, or just because they are too traditional and cannot appreciate their benefits.

Then, this piece intends to provide some theoretical and practical ideas about the new TESOL trends not only for experienced teachers, but also for novice teachers. The trends here discussed, are focused on the different ways in which teachers can manage the four skills as a whole and how they can implement current strategies to assess as a complement stage in a process of change in their philosophy of teaching.

In addition, by reading this paper, teachers will become aware of the importance and the advantages of working with the current ways to assess and the changes that could take place within their classrooms regarding classroom management. So, after reading this document, teachers will have a variety of ways to enhance their classroom management making possible, for instance, that their classes become less boring and more effective by helping teachers to manage some problems like discipline or classroom size.

Furthermore, being the first research paper at the Linguistics and Languages department containing theoretical and practical background related to the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives in assessment, this paper intends to show teachers some reasons to apply alternatives to assess and to integrate the four skills as an essential part of the teaching process.

Moreover, this paper will provide the readers with some points of view from some experts on this field for instance, Richards & Renandya (2002), who, on their articles, try to justify the integration of the four skills. Besides, this document contains different points of view from some theorists like Nunan and Huerta-Macias, A. who support the implementation of current alternatives in assessment.

In order to start with the discussion about the need for integrating the four skills and current alternatives in assessment and in order to foster the development of communicative competence in the L2 classroom, it is important to mention that it is not possible to work with the four skills or to apply current strategies in assessment without adapting a current approach into the syllabi that holds everything together. A well-thought design and planning of the learning combining the elements described before is necessary to create and adapt an adequate environment that is also conducive for the teaching process. Teachers need to implement different strategies and methodologies in order to apply the most suitable current trends because as Albert Einstein said "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results" and Colombian classrooms do need different results.

By immersing in the process of planning, adapting and analyzing which elements can bring about the best results in the L2 classrooms, teachers will be able to modify some aspects such as the assessment process and the way the teaching of the four skills is assumed in EFL settings.

An Integrative Approach

According to current literature, teachers have many possibilities to consider at the moment of choosing the approaches that allow the implementation of the trends above cited within their classrooms. For instance, after the decline of methods, new approaches were introduced. It is well known that some years ago, in the method era there were methods that were just focused on one aspect of the language or just on one skill, like the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) that was based on grammatical patterns. Next, Patror and Celce-Murcia (1979) mention some of the key features of the Grammar Translation Method.

- Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language.

- Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.

- Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.

- Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words.

- Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early.

- Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in in grammatical analysis.

- Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.

- Little or no attention is given to pronunciation

From the features above named it is possible to figure out that effectively, The Grammar Translation Method was just focused on grammatical patterns and related skills such as The writing skill but not in the skills in a holistic way. This works as an evidence of the changes needed for the integration of the four skills.

Then, it is important to point out that through the paper some reasons for the integration of the four skills are mentioned but now, it is essential to clarify that, in real life situations the four skills are working together not separately or individually (Mohan, 1986). Besides, one of the classroom aims is to reflect the real word in order to prepare the learner to the real life situations, then, it is essential to stress the importance of providing the learners the chance to interact with the four skills integrated. (Arslan, 2008)

At that point, considering some of the weaknesses of methods, after being working through the implementation of methods for several years, based on the new needs and challenges for the teaching and learning process, the professional educative community started restructuring the way they had been teaching. As Kumaravadivelu (2006b) suggests,

'… the profession has completed yet another phase in its long, cyclical history of methods and has just sail in uncharted waters. The new millennium has brought new challenges as well as new opportunities for the profession to venture beyond the methods.' It was the firsts step to the change from the method era to the post method era. In here, methods were no longer looked as the central part of the teaching process. 'The death of the Method' as denominated by Allwright (1991) and described by some scholars like Brown (2002) who used the idea " lay to rest" methods and move to the post method era, took place because as Kumaravadivelu (2006b) affirms methods did not have a clear concept and its statements were excessive. …' its ambiguous usage and application, to the exaggerated claims made by its proponents, and, consequently, to the gradual erosion of its utilitarian value.' These are some of the reasons why the post method era commenced providing the teacher community with approaches that would develop the communicative competence changing the class environment.

Accordingly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of studies were carried out to determine whether exposure to and communicative interaction in the L2 enables learners to attain L2 speaking facilities that address fluency and accuracy in language production (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 1990). It was the beginning of the post method era. As it was mentioned before, the post method era is an era in which the decline of methods occurred and Approaches appeared as the new way of teaching integrating the four skills. As the new approaches are based on the concept of the Communicative Competence they try to develop interaction and real communication within the classroom by integrating the skills as a hole that is why they are called integrative approaches.

Some of the approaches considered as fundamental bases for the integration of the four skills and for the implementation of the current alternatives to assess are, first, Content Based Instruction (CBI), in which according to Oxford (2001), students practice all the language

skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion while they learn some content such as science, mathematics or social studies. Content-based language instruction is valuable at all levels of proficiency and provides teachers and learners with the possibility of interacting by applying the four skills. Second, Task Based Instruction (TBI) in this approach the students participate in communicative activities using the SL. It allows them to interact using the language in a natural way through the development of tasks, which also implies the use of the skills in an integrated way. 'Tasks are defined as activities that can stand alone as fundamental units and that require comprehending, producing, manipulating, or interacting in authentic language while attention is principally paid to meaning rather than form'(Nunan, 1999).Third, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which stands out the importance of knowing that there is no way to learn a language without practicing, without listening, speaking, reading and writing the language that you are learning; in other words without seeing all the skills as parts that have to be integrated and managed together.

Knowing some of the most important integrative approaches that could help teachers to integrate the four skills now, it is also important to apply them. It could seem a big change but, that is what the Colombian educational field needs and, even if sometimes it could be really difficult, it is necessary to do it, because, there is no way to integrate the four skills without considering the theory that suggests teachers to start working with approaches but also, without thinking about the conditions that teachers and learners actually have in their context.

There is no doubt about the effectiveness of the integrative approaches because they are well supported by some theorists like Nunan, so, they can provide teachers a necessary guide for integrating the four skills based on the last pieces of research done in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field.

After knowing some of the approaches that justify and permit the integration of the four skills, it is important to point out some of the reasons or possible advantages mentioned by Oxford (2001). These advantages show why it is necessary to integrate the four skills within any English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and, besides, they work as motivation for teachers to apply them.

First of all, the trends discussed in this piece, enhance accuracy but also fluency, because by integrating the four skills students not only learn some grammatical patterns but also develop their speaking skills. For instance, they can develop as a class activity, a task in which, in groups, they will have to read something in order to identify some grammatical structures and at the end, they will have to make an oral summary of the reading. In this simple activity they are focused on reading and speaking but also on grammatical structures without teaching grammar.

Second, by integrating the four skills learners get exposed to authentic language. For instance, learners can interact among themselves in the second language (L2) with the purpose of asking for information in a natural way.

Third, the integration of the skills make students notice that English is not only a subject but also a necessary tool to share among people, of course, it could increase the student's motivation because they are going to be working in different ways; not only translating but speaking, reading, watching and listening to some videos that show the different possibilities that English as a language, presents.

Fourth, students become more autonomous, less passive and more creative. These advantages make the learning process more interesting and interactional for the learners and the teacher too. Finally, the four integrated skills will make teaching coherent because the process of teaching is going to have a flow.

The reasons for integrating the four skills were mentioned to show teachers the advantages of incorporating current practices such as the integration of the four skills and the alternatives to assess to the EFL classroom.

Now, once teachers have decided to integrate the four skills within their classrooms, it is important to consider some strategies they can use when integrating the skills. It is essential to know the different ways to work with the four skills without being repetitive and ineffective. But, in order to do this, it is indispensable to mention some of the features of the way in which a big number of teachers have been teaching in the last 20 years. In order to do this, next a list of some problems or mistakes made by teachers when teaching English as a second language is showed.

(a) They have been focused on forms; they have been teaching just grammar. Possibly, it is the reason why a considerable number of students hate English. (b) Their classes have been teacher centered; teachers were the authority and the people in charge of transmitting the knowledge. (c) They have made emphasis just on product without considering the most important thing in the learning process, the process. (d) And they have assessed with tests that just test.

Instead of doing these things and making the mistakes that Richards & Renandya, (2002, pg. 335) presents, teachers could adapt different strategies designed to help them to overcome the old problems already mentioned.

Strategies for integrating the four skills

The strategies now discussed were mentioned by Richards & Renandya (2002, pg. 335) as a possible starting point to integrate the four skills and apply current approaches. Possibly,

it is going to aid teachers to enhance their classes and to integrate the four skills at the same time. Some of the strategies are:

1. Teachers have to be focused on communication, which will allow students to participate using the second language (L2) and applying some grammatical patterns in an unconscious way.

2. The new classes will be learner centered. It will help students to become into more motivated and autonomous learners.

3. In order to integrate the four skills, teachers need to be focused on the process of learning paying attention to the methodology they used, the materials implemented, the time they have and every aspect that could affect directly or indirectly the language learning.

4. Teacher assessment is going to be done in every stage of the learning process and also with tests but they are going to teach instead of just testing.

As it was explained, by applying strategies as the ones just mentioned, teachers could enhance the effectiveness of the teaching process, nevertheless, as teachers need to apply new approaches in order to integrate the four skills inside a classroom, it is also important to say that another aspect to be modified is the assessment process. It is because teaching is a very complex process that is always working as a whole. Then, if you modify something at the beginning of the process you have to be coherent and modify the rest of the things you consider need to be adapted, in this case the assessment part.

Current Alternatives in Assessment

Assessment is a crucial part in the teaching and learning process. Then, after you as a teacher, have thought your contents, it is very important to apply a process that allow you, as

a teacher, to verify the effectiveness of the teaching process you have carried out. In order to provide teachers with some ideas that could enhance the assessment process they are developing through the integration of the four skills, some important aspects about assessment are discussed, next.

Assessment is one of the most complex stages in the learning process because it permits teachers to realize the strong points and the weak points of the process developed inside the classroom. Before the 1990's our testing and assessment were based on behaviorist views of cognition and improvement, but after 1990's it was suggested that some alternative ways of testing are needed to evaluate a person's performance (Hancock, 1994). As Hancock affirms, assessment has suffered radical changes; going form the traditional assessment which is the one that many teachers have used during the last 20 years to the alternatives assessment.

Although, to find a standardized definition of alternative assessment maybe difficult. Its main purpose is defined as, to "gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real-life tasks in a particular domain" (Huerta-Macias, 1995). Besides, it is relevant to consider that in order to make Alternative assessment effective it has to meet the following criteria:

1. Focus is on documenting individual student growth over time, rather than comparing students with another one.

2. Emphasis is on students' strengths (what they know), rather than weaknesses (what they don't know).

3. Consideration is given to the learning styles, language proficiencies, cultural and educational backgrounds, and grade levels of students.

It is very important that the alternatives in assessment applied meet these criteria; it is because they are considered as features that make the alternatives in assessment different from the traditional assessment process.

In addition, teachers have to take into account that the alternatives in assessment include a variety of measures that can be adapted for different situations; it means that the alternatives in assessment require to be incorporated in certain kind of practices. Tannenbaum (2011) cites that, "Alternative assessment refers to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction, and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom'' (Hamayan, 1995).

Some of the techniques to which Hamayan makes reference are also considered as practical ideas for assessing the teaching and learning process and they can be classified as the use of checklists of student behavior, products, journals, reading logs, videos of role plays, audio tapes of discussion, self-evaluation questionnaires, work samples, and teacher observations or anecdotal records.

Practical ideas for assessing the Teaching and Learning Process. As assessment is a fundamental element in the teaching and learning process, teachers, have to consider that, if they assess in a wrong way they will not be sure about the results obtained from the assessment part and additionally, they will not be really sure if they are doing things well or not. Then, the teaching and learning process needs some current alternatives in assessment that provide more accurate results. The implementation of the current alternatives in assessment is directly related to the application of some techniques as a way of providing teachers with guides at the moment of applying the current alternatives in assessment. As practical techniques such as the just mentioned, are considered as very useful tools at the moment of adapting current alternatives in assessment, next, a list of some strategies

provided by Tannenbaum (2011), is presented for guiding teachers in the implementation and adaptation of the current trends within their classes.

- Nonverbal assessment strategies, these strategies are related, for example, to physical demonstration, pictorial products.

- K-W-L Charts: Many teachers have success using K-W-L charts (what I *know*/what I *want* to know/what I've *learned*) to begin and end a unit of study, particularly in social studies, languages and sciences. This strategy enables teachers to gain an awareness of students' background knowledge and interests. Subsequently, it helps teachers to assess the content material learned.

- Oral performance or presentations: this kind of assessment includes interviews, oral reports, role plays, describing, explaining, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing stories or text material, and so on. Oral assessment should be done in a continuous way in order to assess comprehension and thinking skills.

- Oral and writing products: Some of the oral and written products useful for assessing ESL students' progress are content area, thinking and learning logs, reading response logs, writing assignments (both structured and creative), dialogue journals, and audio or video cassettes.

- Portfolios: Brown (2001) provides as a definition given by Genesee and Upshur (1996) in which portfolios are seen as, a purposeful collection of student's work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas. Also, portfolios can include such items as reports on books read, notes from learner/teacher interviews, and learners' reflections on their progress, writing samples, data from performance-based assessments, and scores on commercially available tests (Fingeret, 1993).

Polaksowski (1993) mentioned some of the benefits of portfolios, and affirmed that portfolios are a striking alternative to more traditional assessment approaches for teaching children. He enumerated the benefits of portfolio as follows:

1. It complements such developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction as whole language, hands-on approaches, and process mathematics.

2. It also allows them to assess children's individual learning styles.

3. It enhances their ability to communicate with parents about children's learning.

4. It helps to fulfill professional requirements of school and community accountability.

Following that, there are other strategies that could allow teachers to change their traditional ways to assess by the current ones. For instance, Brown (2001) mentions the following strategies:

- Self-and peer assessment: this kind of evaluation guarantees students involvement, interaction, motivation and autonomy because of the student's direct participation in the assessment process.

- Journals: "Journals can range from language learning logs, to grammar discussions, to responses to reading, to attitudes and feelings about oneself" (Brown, 2001). Brown also, mentions some tips to consider when using journals, for example:

  - Specify the journal purpose.

  - Provide clear instructions to the students.

  - Give time management specifications.

  - Provide students with a feedback.

  - Do not lose the journal purpose.

- Conferences: conferences are defined as a conversation about a student's work that could enhance the interaction among the students and provide a feedback for them. Through conferences, a teacher assumes the role of a facilitator and guide, rather than a master controller and deliverer of final grades (Brown, 2001)

- Cooperative test construction: the idea of cooperative test construction is to integrate learners in the process of assessing, not only doing the test but designing them. It could sound difficult to do but it depends on the way that teachers use to apply this strategy considering the topic, the class profile and the learner's needs.

Current Colombian Educational Context

Even if there are lots of research reports that justify the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives in assessment such as, 'Current Perspectives on Teaching the Four Skills' (2006), 'Necessary English: A Faculty Survey' (1981), 'Word Integration Skills and the Nature of L2/ESL Word Integration Development Involved in Lower-Level Text Processing. Language Learning' (2001), and also, even if teachers can find a big number of current alternatives in assessment, here, in Colombia, there seems to be a lack of application of the trends pointed out in this piece of research. This could facilitate and enhance the way in which teachers assess the L2 learning process.

Some of the reasons why teachers may not have implemented the current alternatives to assess could reside on the fact that they are still in the method era neglecting or ignoring current approaches that would allow them to integrate the four skills. But, thinking about the Colombian educational context, what could be some of the possible difficulties and the advantages at the moment of implementing the current alternatives in assessment, in Colombia?

After having read some papers containing current information about classroom management from some authors like Lewis (2001) and Huertas in Brown (2001), based on my experience as a student and also as a teacher in public institutions in Colombia, I would say that some of the possible reasons why some teachers neglect alternatives in assessment are: First, because of the Teacher English proficiency. It is because a big number of Colombian teachers have not had the opportunity to update their knowledge about English, maybe because of time, money or geographical facts that not allow them to access to the current information. This lack of knowledge can affect the teaching and learning process as Sánchez & Obando (2008) mentioned, '…Teaching encompasses many aspects that sciences like psychology, sociolinguistics, linguistics and second language acquisition have analyzed and that a real teacher needs to know in order to adapt suitable teaching and assessment practices.'

Additionally, there seems to be a lack of motivation not only from students but also from a large number of teachers in our context. This lack of motivation can be linked to the teaching conditions described, which reduce the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Thus, some teachers seem to ignore the new trends on TESOL which leads to an underdeveloped process which lacks updated practices. Perhaps, it is also due to the fact that some teachers are too traditional and do not like the idea of changing their philosophy of teaching.

Besides, some of the reasons why teachers neglect the implementation of the trends here mentioned, inside the classroom can be related to classroom management. For instance, the lack of materials is considered as a possible difficulty because, the implementation of current methodological trends involve the execution of new technology such as, TV sets, computers or laboratories. But, in some Colombian public institutions there are few computers, no TV

sets and which is even worst students have not dictionaries so, it is going interfere in the current trends process of implementation. Moreover, the time assigned for the English courses in public institutions is not enough. Sánchez & Obando. (2008) mentioned that '…in some schools only one or two hours a week is devoted to foreign language classes.' Then, it is going to affect in a very serious way the implementation of the current trends inside the classroom.

In addition, Class size is the most evident problem in our current context Sánchez & Obando. (2008) Class size is affecting not only the teachers but also the learners who are attending classes in crowded classrooms. Furthermore, Affective, social and economic learner's problems affect not only the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives to assess but also the teaching and learning process in general because students are worried about money making, familiar problems such as violence or parents' divorce affecting directly their academic formation.

After mentioning some of the possible difficulties when integrating current trends in Colombia, it is also essential to point out some of the potentialities that teachers would have to consider at the moment of applying the trends discussed. The potentialities as well as the reasons why, possibly, teachers neglect the integration of the four skills and the implementation of alternatives to assess are defined after having overviewed some authors and also, from my experience as a teacher.

One of the main potentialities when implementing alternative assessment combined with current methodological trends is that in Colombian settings, there is a considerable number of students that have been taking traditional tests. It means that they required or ask for current alternatives to assess. In other words, students love making different activities that could be designed based on the particular needs and purpose of the English course. In this way

teachers would be taking advantage of the students likes by using current alternatives to assess as well as by integrating the four skills.

In order to support the idea that students are looking for a change, it is important to mention that students have different artistic abilities that can be used as diverse alternatives to asses in different ways, as it was explained before the main idea is to take the conditions teachers have into the classrooms and organize them for applying the current trends mentioned on this piece.

To continue with the possible potentialities for the implementation of the needed trends, it is essential to consider that students can work in these alternatives as homework that would imply independent work and autonomous learning.

Nevertheless, even if the Colombian context would provide teachers with some potentialities like the previously mentioned, it is necessary to say that the two main potentialities for implementing the trends here examined are, first, by implementing them more than one skill is going to be considered making possible that students change the grammatical structured classes by more communicative ones, and second, the assessment process would be fair for the students. In other words the assessment will measure the students' performance in a correct way, considering, not only their grammatical performance but the level of their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

The facts just mentioned could represent some of the considerations teachers have to take into account when applying the current alternatives in assessment. Of course, nowadays, there are some contra points for instance, the policies from the government or the economical student's situation. But, on the other hand, teachers could not justify the fact that they have not applied alternatives to assess or worked with the skills in an integrative way based on the

difficulties before cited or argue that it could be a big change for their students; there are no

excuses at the moment of promoting the integration of the four skills and the current

alternatives in assessment. There is not a single reason to ignore them, because the trends

reviewed are based on current theories and on well done pieces of research and besides, there

are strong reasons as the one mentioned in this paper, for their implementation.

In addition, it is possible to affirm that by integrating the four skills in a holistic way and

applying current alternatives to assess inside the teaching and learning process, teachers

would have the chance to start modifying the Colombian educational setting. As it was

explained before, it can be difficult but as Tannenbaum (2011) affirms 'Although the

challenge to modify existing methods of assessment and to develop new approaches is not an

easy one, the benefits for both teachers and students are great' then, the integration of the

skills and the application of the alternatives to assess could provide an opportunity to move

forward a new era in the Colombian educational field.

Now, remember, good teachers always adapt their philosophy of teaching to the new

educational trends so, considering the reasons above provided for the integration of the four

skills and the current alternatives to assess and the information delivered, try to integrate

them when planning your classes.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is to provide teachers with different points of view from

different authors that justify the integrations of the four skills and the current alternatives in

assessment. Then, on this paper are included some approaches that validate the integration of

the four skills, the different alternatives to asses and some of the ways by which teachers can

integrate them in their classes. The approaches mentioned on this piece are denominated

integrative approaches because they try to work with the four skills as a whole. So, content based instruction and communicative language teaching are approaches focused on the development of the communicative competence. This is why they allow teachers to work in an integrative way with the four skills and demonstrate that the integration of the current trends specified all over the piece could enhance the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, based on the literature analyzed and discussed, it is important to mention that the integration of the four skills will bring some advantages not only for the teachers but also for the learners and for the classroom environment in general. As a complement and a necessary part for the integration of the four skills process, the need of implementing current alternatives into the assessment process in the Colombian context is displayed indicating that assessment is a decisive part of the teaching process that could be enhanced by integrating some current alternatives in assessment such as the ones previously pointed out.

Additionally, considering that the role of the current alternatives in assessment is to provide teachers with some data to evaluate the teaching and learning process, their students and the teacher job itself, it can be concluded that by applying some of the current alternatives in assessment described on the paper, there will be an improvement in the teaching and learning process since they provide new opportunities to measure the students' performance.

Moreover, through the paper it was clearly shown that by working with the four skills in an integrative way and implementing the current alternatives in assessment, some of the difficulties presented in the Colombian educational context could be solved or managed in a better way. For instance, "improving their Language proficiency, being prepared to teach in diverse contexts, teaching with and without resources, implementing classroom-based

research, having access to professional development, networking, and educating teacher educators" are some of the possible problems mentioned by Sánchez & Obando (2008) that could be solved or better managed considering all the benefits presented by the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives to assess.

Additionally, on this piece, it is stressed that the teaching process is a very complex process that probably, if we consider the information contained on this paper about the current trends mentioned, would change in some of his critical and weak points. In this way, considering and knowing some of the possible difficulties, teachers will be prepared for solving some of the potential problems found when integrating the skills and incorporating the alternatives to assess in the syllabi.

Besides, the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives in assessment could be seen as one of the possible solutions for the problems found in the Colombian context such as discipline, class size and time assigned to the English course in public institutions. But, before considering that the educational Colombian system is working as it has to, there are lots of things needing to be modified, for instance, the problems related to classroom management as the time assigned for the English courses.

As a conclusion, it is possible to affirm that the integration of the four skills and the implementation of the current alternatives in assessment are strongly related while both of them have a relationship with the adaptation of the new approaches of English as a second language (ESL). It means that implementing current trends requires a whole process of change. It is necessary to adapt current approaches that permit the integration of the four skills giving at the same time, the possibility to use the current alternatives in assessment as it is mentioned by Oxford (2001),

…foreign language classes are comparable to woven tapestry from many strands, such as the characteristics of the teacher, the learner, the setting, and the relevant languages. For the instructional loom to produce a large, strong, beautiful, colorful tapestry, all of these strands must be interwoven in positive and productive ways. For example, the instructor's teaching style must address the learning style of the learner, the learner must be motivated, and the setting must provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of the language. However, if the strands are not woven together effectively, the instructional loom is likely to produce something small, weak, ragged, and pale—not recognizable as a tapestry at all… (pp. 1)

Then, it is clear that for working with the four skills as a whole and with the alternatives to assess there needs to be a change that would help not only the teacher but also the leaners and the teaching setting in general. Then it is a teacher's job to try to catch up with the new TESOL trends and of course to integrate these recent tendencies into their classrooms. This is the way by which things are going to change, English level will enhance, students will become more active and motivated, and in general the learning process will be affected in a positive way becoming a more effective process.

As a final point, once the relevance of the integration of the four skills and the current alternatives in assessment was illustrated through the literature review, it is necessary to remark that it is also a priority for teachers and learners to adopt the two key trends in order to overcome the problems that have been affecting the Colombian educational system during the last 20 years making possible in a way, that the teaching and learning process in Colombia enhance some of its weak points like the methodology implemented at the moment of assessing.

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