COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to examine how teachers in the Language Center work and assess Communicative Competence inside the classroom, identifying whether or not they are implementing all its subcomponents, which strategies they are using and if they are successful in English learning in order to set a proposal that will be a useful tool for them when analyzing their teaching practice. For this purpose, some surveys about the basic components and theories about C.C. were applied as well as some interviews to have a wider perception of what teachers know and think about competences. Finally, some observations to the half of the population were done to confront the information given by teachers and the reality inside the classrooms. The results showed that although teachers know the Language Center follows a Communicative approach and therefore it pursues the development of Communicative Competence; they do not have a clear idea about competences and how to work on them. Consequently, they continue giving primacy to grammar explanations and drills, and most of the Communicative Competence's subcomponents are neglected, without leading to a meaningful learning.

RESUMEN

Este estudio buscó explorar cómo los profesores del Centro de Idiomas trabajan y evalúan la Competencia Comunicativa (C.C), identificando si implementan cada uno de sus subcomponentes, qué estrategias están usando y si éstas son exitosas o no en el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero para plantear una propuesta que servirá como herramienta al analizar su práctica en la enseñanza del Inglés. Para lograr este propósito, se realizaron algunas encuestas sobre los componentes básicos y las teorías de la C.C., así como también entrevistas con el fin de tener una amplia percepción acerca de lo que los profesores conocen y piensan sobre competencias. Finalmente, se realizaron observaciones a la mitad de la población para confrontar la información dada por los docentes y la realidad dentro de los salones de clase. Los resultados revelaron que aunque los profesores conocen que el Centro de Idiomas sigue un enfoque comunicativo y propende, por lo tanto el desarrollo de la C.C, ellos no tienen una idea clara sobre competencias y como desarrollarlas. Por consiguiente, los profesores continúan dando mayor importancia a las explicaciones y ejercicios gramaticales olvidando por completo la mayoría de los componentes de la Competencia Comunicativa, situación que no conduce a un aprendizaje significativo.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, communicating in English has become a requirement due to the internationalisation and globalisation of this language. That is why it is imperative for teachers to focus on developing communicative skills. One attempt to reach this goal has been analysed and developed by the actual government of Colombia.

Some time ago, English Language Education in Colombia placed great emphasis on teaching grammar aspects. It was not until the last decade when the Colombian government began to take action on English education as a compulsory subject in the curriculum (ICFES, 2004).

Within the scope of the new trends of language teaching, boards of education and schools started to work on a new English teaching style to enable students to acquire Communicative Competence, a concept which was discussed by Chomsky (1963),Hymes (1972) Canale and Swain (1980 and 1980)Bachman (1990) and Sandra Savignon (1983).

According to all these researchers language learners need to know how real language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes. (Aspects of Communicative Competence: pdf/elt/catalogue/0-6-442172-4-b.pdf). Consequently, the aim of this paper was to find out the common techniques teachers use to work with and assess

competences. Finally, a proposal, as the most suitable way

to measure Communicative Competence was presented.

CHAPTER 1: TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS

Topic

Presentation and assessment of competences in English

Title

Communicative Competence in English teaching

The problem statement

The conception of evaluation has considerably changed in Colombia due to the new laws of evaluation through competences and standards proposed by "Ministerio de Educación Nacional" (MEN) and the "Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior" (ICFES, 1995).

Regarding that, some research about this topic is being developed in our country; the Ministry of Education has proposed some standards teachers must follow in certain subjects and three main competences which are: interpretative, argumentative and propositive, but for languages it proposes different competences which are not very well known by teachers and students, especially in our city where little research has been developed, and where there seem not to be specific guidelines to work and assess competences in foreign language teaching.

Without considering this problem, ICFES continues assessing competences in each field of knowledge and teachers in Pasto do not have strong bases to work those competences in their classes.

As a result, students are not prepared for the kind of assessment the government demands when they present their ICFES test, which is an exam that students who are finishing high school must present before graduating and that contains questions about the main subjects and topics they studied during the 11 years in school.

Regarding all these educational circumstances it is a need to identify how teachers assess the process of language learning within the frame of Communicative Competence, recognizing what type of techniques they use to develop their students' proficiency and how those techniques work.

The obtained information was carefully analyzed by revealing strengths and weaknesses of the teaching process implemented by teachers in the Language Center which advocates a communicative methodology, in order to suggest an appropriate way to work and assess competences.

Research question

How do teachers in the Language Center work with and assess Communicative Competence in English?

Justification

Developing a research about Assessment of Competences in Foreign Languages is a goal that gave us not only an important theoretical framework but also may contribute to improve teachers' awareness about the philosophy to be

followed when teaching a foreign language in the Language Center at the University of Nariño.

For teachers, this research contributed to:

Create a theoretical and methodological knowledge of the existing framework for Competences, analyze the use of materials and specific strategies to work on Communicative Competence and the way to assess it in order to provide them with some guidelines to apply the suggested strategies and to formulate new techniques according to the institutional context. Finally, it was expected that by answering some questions teachers would reflect on their procedures and realize the importance of assessment in a communicative course as a dynamic tool for Language Learning.

For students this research helped to:

Consider assessment as a valuable tool for enhancing learning and demonstrate students' oral and written competences in the foreign language.

For the educational institution, this research helped to:

Present teachers with alternatives for teaching considering Communicative competence as a dynamic process of learning with different components that must be worked and assessed together. Initiate a design process and curriculum program for competences. Promote the acquisition of

resources and materials that allow an adequate process of learning and teaching English.

General objective

    To identify how teachers, in the Language Center at the University of Nariño, work with and assess Communicative Competence.

Specific objectives

    To define which components of Communicative Competence, teachers develop and assess in their work at the Language Center.

    To identify through observations if teachers work towards the development of Communicative Competence in English teaching.

    To determine how teachers approach grammatical competence.

    To describe the strategies teachers use to assess their students' competence.

    To propose a possible strategy to be applied in order to focus more on the development of Communicative Competence in the Language Center.

Hypothesis

Teachers do not have a clear understanding of the elements that Communicative Competence encompasses in terms of techniques, procedure and assessment, therefore Communicative Competence is not developed.

Variables

Assessment of competences has a direct effect on the significant learning of the target language.

Significant learning depends on the procedures competences presented and implemented by the teacher.

VARIABLE	DIMENSIONS	INDICATORS
Independent variable: Assessment of competences	Assessment	Performance tests
		Pencil and paper tests
		Achievement tests
		Proficiency tests
	Competences	Linguistic competence
		Discourse competence
		Strategic competence
		Sociolinguistic competence
Dependent variable: Language learning.	Skills	Reading
		Speaking
		Listening
		Writing
	Knowledge	Grammar
		Lexicon and Vocabulary
		Functions
		Pronunciation
		Appropriacy

CHAPTER TWO: REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Antecedents

Nowadays, teachers must deal with many factors and innovations proposed by the government. Especially in English teaching that has suffered multiple changes since 1975, when it was recognized as a part of educational programs in high school and which had an emphasis on grammar and translation (ICFES, 2004).

In the 90's, the Ministry of Education in Colombia considered multilinguism as an educative priority. That is why it promotes foreign language teaching since elementary school.

In law 115 (1994) of the General Education Law, the Ministry of Education establishes English as a compulsory subject to be included in the P.E.I. (Proyecto Educativo Institutional) of each educational institution. Moreover, the MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional) emphasizes on a curriculum based on processes and competences with flexible and participative features.

According to the MEN, the domain of competences in foreign language is a tool to improve the quality of life. As a result, the MEN proposes a methodology focused almost entirely on communication with little attention paid to the mechanical learning of structures. However, it is difficult

to assert that this is how foreign languages are taught in Colombia.

It is worth mentioning that the concept of competence, which can be complex for teachers now, is not new at all. In fact, the first person who talked about competences was the linguist Noam Chomsky, quoted by Rod, E. (1994) who introduced this term to explain the intuitive and practical knowledge of an ideal speaker that enables him to produce correct sentences. (Savignon, S., 1983)

Chomsky considers the necessity to distinguish competence and performance. Competence, as the knowledge that native speakers have of their language as a system of abstract formal relations, and performance, as their actual behavior.

According to him, competence consists on the mental presentations of linguistic rules that constitute the speaker-hearer's internal ground (Ellis, R., 1965), which refers to the knowledge of the items and rules that comprise the formal system of language.

In coining the term, against Chomsky's conceptions, Dell Hymes demonstrated a shift of emphasis among linguistists, away from a narrow focus on language as a formal system.

Hymes was the one who, ultimately redefined this term by adding the "communicative" element to "competence"

Hymes (quoted by Savignon. S., 1983) was concerned with the social and cultural knowledge which speakers need in order to understand and use linguistic forms. He sets competence as the most general term that refers to each person's capabilities. He makes a difference between competence, the abstract knowledge, and performance, as the ability to use the knowledge. Then, Hymes took the view (Savignon, S., 2002) and introduced the concept of Communicative Competence, in which he included not only the ability to form correct sentences but to use them at appropriate times.

Since Hymes presented this idea in the early 1970's, it has been expanded considerably, and various types of competences have been proposed. However, the basic conception of Communicative Competence remains the ability to use language appropriately, both receptively and productively, in real situations.

In relation to this, other theorists, including those working in the field of education have taken different positions. Canale and Swain (1980 in Rod. E., 1994), for example, chose to exclude "ability to use" from their definition of "competence"; they argue in favor of including sociolinguistic discourse and strategic knowledge within the area.

These explanations were the model that let us set up this research, in order to help teachers be aware of their practices inside the classroom and to make them realize if those practices match the idea of Communicative Competence that is advocated nowadays. Knowing what teachers really do in the classroom, knowing their insights on it and comparing those procedures to current literature may lead to the improvement of the teaching and assessing processes.

Initially this study was aimed to teachers and students from the Language Center of the Linguistics and Languages Department at the University of Nariño. However, it is possible that some of these findings can be extrapolated to high school teaching in our setting.

In Colombia, a theoretical and normative frame has been made explicit; however, research oriented to the study of foreign language teaching is scarce. In different academic events theory and documents have been the focus, but the government has not suggested strategies oriented to the development of Communicative Competence in real life.

This research intended to describe the theoretical basis of Communicative Competence as well as the discussion of some practical issues that teachers should consider in the classroom when developing and assessing competences.

Theoretical framework

The term competence has achieved a big relevance in the field of education in our country since the year 2000 when the "Instituto Colombiano de Educación Superior" (ICFES) began to assess competences in each compulsory subject of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the "Ministerio de Educación Nacional" (MEN) has not set this concept. In fact, after the 60's competences became a synonym of progress and educative innovation (Savignon, 1983).

This concept, whose origin was in the field of linguistics, has been studied and assimilated by many authors who have given to the term different points of view, dividing competences in different ways.

For English teaching, the ICFES (2004) refers to the term competence as the knowledge of performing something in context which is not completely clear and does not explain how teachers can develop competences in foreign language teaching.

The query emerges then, when we try to understand the term competence: what do we understand as competence? What does it imply in foreign language teaching?

Therefore, this chapter was addressed to clarify some features of competences, revealing their importance in English teaching. Finally, a concise interpretation of what the ICFES and the MEN have defined as competences will be

discussed in this paper identifying strengths and weaknesses of their perception.

Competences in the early 60's

In order to understand the notion of competence it is necessary to know how this concept emerged in second language teaching. As Savignon (1971; ICFES, 2004) states, working on competences is not a novelty. Although the term of competence has received widespread uses in the field of English teaching, it was first known in the business world, when David McClelland, a Harvard psychologist, put forward the importance of assessing competences for a particular job (Savignon, 1983).

In the field of linguistics, in the mid-twentieth century, Noam Chomsky (cited in Rod, 1994) introduced the concept of linguistic competence as the knowledge that native ideal listener-speakers have of the language as a system of abstract formal relations.

This assumption of underlying competence common to all native speakers was contradicted by Dell Hymes in 1972 (cited by Savignon, 1983) when he set that competence concerns to a "real speaker-listener" instead of an "ideal speaker-listener" which is an abstraction that does not exist in real communication. Then Hymes proposed a Communicative Competence in opposition to the linguistic competence assumed by Chomsky (Savignon, 2002).

As Savignon (2001) expresses, Hymes' Communicative Competence can be seen as the equivalent of Halliday's meaning potential that covers both knowing and doing the notion of language functions.

The British Linguist Halliday (Savignon, 1983) adds a new perspective to the theory of Communicative Competence based on the functions of language. He states that "the context of a situation provides a first approximation to the specification of the components of the communicative situation" (Halliday, 1971)

Meanwhile, in the University of Illinois, Savignon (1971; 2002) explained further that Communicative Competence refers to the ability that learners of a language use to interact with others in order to produce meaningful communication rather than repetitive non-meaningful utterances.

Competency based language teaching (CBLT)

All these researchers have given support to the establishment of new trends in the field of language teaching. One of them is the Communicative Language Teaching proposed by Savignon, but the method that has made a deep study in competence is Competency-Based Language Teaching CBLT whose features and nature will be presented in the following paragraphs.

According to Richards (n.d., cited by Nunan, 2001) Competence Based Language Teaching is an application of the principles of Competency-Based Education to language teaching. It was developed as an alternative to the use of objectives in program planning.

As Nunan (2001) explains, CBLT focuses on what learners should be able to do at the end of a course of instruction which can be similar to the attainment of objectives.

To set the difference between competence and objectives, Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that competences describe the student's ability to apply basic and other skills in real situations that are used in everyday life, whereas objectives are individual achievements in relation to a group.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) go on to say that CBLT is based on a functional and interactional view of the nature of language. It aims to teach language in relation to the social context in which it is used to interact with other speakers in order to achieve their purposes.

Therefore, CBLT presents many advantages for teachers in the field of language teaching, as Docking expresses:

"Competency-Based approaches to teaching and assessment offer teachers an opportunity to revitalize their education and training programs. Not only will the quality of assessment improve but the quality of teaching and student learning will be enhanced by the clear specification of expected outcomes and the continuous feedback that

competency-based assessment can offer." (1994; in Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 142)

Therefore, Competency-Based Language Teaching can be used as an effective tool for teachers in second language teaching because it promotes learning not through the knowledge of linguistic code but through the students' outcomes.

However, CBLT does not clarify the concept of competences and it does not refer to how competences can be developed in foreign language teaching.

Towards a concept of Communicative Competence

In Fact, the concept of competence is the consequence of the evolution of concepts expressed in different terms and focuses through history, for example, as faculty (XVII century), as cognitive development (Piaget), higher psychic functions (Vygotsky),intuitive knowledge (Chomsky),and culture negotiation(Bruner),among others.

Concerning this issue, Hymes (1972, cited in Niño, 2003) expresses: "I must take competences as the most general term to refer to one's capacities".

In Colombia, almost for a decade Competences surrounds educational politicies as a strong attempt to find a connection between knowledge and application, between theory and practice. However, it seems to be a new concept. What does this phenomenon mean?

In relation to this problem, Spector and la Teja (2001; Vera Quiroz, 2003) affirm:

"Competence refers to a state of being well qualified to perform an activity, task or job function. When a person is competent to do something, he or she has achieved a state of competence that is recognizable and verifiable to a particular community of practitioners." [Spector and La Teja, 2001, in Vera Quiroz, 2003, p.1]

To amplify this concept, Daniel Bogoya (2003) expresses further, that competences are always associated with a specific field of knowledge (i.e., a person is competent or apt in circumstances in which learning makes part of a game.)

On her account, Maria Cristina Torrado (2000; cited in Niño, 2003) understands competence as the knowledge that someone has and the use that s/he makes of that knowledge resolving a task in a specific situation, and according to certain contexts, necessities and concrete demands.

After having clarified the term competence it is important to set its importance for language Teaching.

According to Savignon (1983), we all use the language to interact with those around us for specific purposes (e.g., keeping warm, dry and fed), that means that we learn a language to communicate. Therefore, in the 70's the aim in teaching a language changed from the simple mastery of structures and pronunciation to more communicative and interactional goals. As Margaret Mead (cited in Savignon,

1983) says in relation to her own experience dealing with different languages, it is not necessary to be an expert in Linguistics, more importantly is to communicate with others and make them understand the message.

As Bachman and Palmer (1996 in ICFES, 2004) note effective language use requires both "organizational knowledge" (what is said) and "contextual knowledge" (when to use). Not only must a speaker demonstrate lexical and structural language knowledge, but also effectively implement that knowledge in real time conversations.

Taking into account the considerations mentioned above, the importance of being competent to communicate is then required and a goal in Communicative Competence is proclaimed.

As stated by Hymes (1971, cited by Savignon, 2001), Communicative Competence is the use of language in social context, or the appropriate application of sociolinguistic norms. To achieve that competence, Hymes proposes four parameters that underlie communicative behavior:

"Whether (and to what extent) something is formally possible; whether (and to what extent) something is feasible; whether (and to what extent) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated; and finally, whether (and to what extend) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails".[1971; Savignon,1983: 12]

Savignon (1971; 2002), on her account, explains the term Communicative Competence as the ability to function in a truly communicative setting (i.e., in a dynamic exchange in which the knowledge of the linguistic code must be adapted to the total communicative situation). She defines it in terms of "expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning" (Savignon, 1983).

This concept is totally opposed to the view of linguistic competence or the mastery of the sound system and basic structural patterns of a language. Whereas Communicative Competence is tested by means of proficiency, this linguistic competence is typically tested by descript point tests which consist of separate elements of language.

Communicative Competence is related to the knowledge and use of all aspects of a language including the kinesic features that enhance communication. Therefore, linguistic accuracy is but one of the main constituents in this complex interaction of Communicative Competence (Savignon, 1972 in 1983).

A more recent survey of Communicative Competence by Bachman (1990 in ICFES, 2004) divides it into the broad headings of "organizational competence," which includes both grammatical and discourse (or textual) competence, and "pragmatic competence," which includes both sociolinguistic and "illocutionary" competence.

Sociolinguistic competence involves the sensitivity to dialect or variety, sensitivity to register, sensitivity to naturalness and cultural references and figures of speech. On the other hand, the illocutionary competence concentrates on ideational functions, manipulative functions, heuristic functions and imaginative functions. Consequently, Bachman (1990) mentions the components of communicative language ability in communicative language use as follows: Knowledge of structures (knowledge of the world), Language competence (knowledge of language), strategic competence, psycho physiological mechanisms and context of situation.

To make this concept widely clear, Savignon (1983) explains five characteristics of Communicative Competence. According to her, (1) Communicative Competence is a dynamic concept, it depends on the negotiation of meaning between two or more persons who speak the same language. (2) It applies to both written and spoken language. (3) It is context specific (i.e., communication depends on the specific situation in which the act of communication is taken place). (4) Communicative Competence depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved and finally, (5) there is a theoretical difference between competence and performance. Competence is the ability, the knowledge the speaker has and that is necessary to communicate and the

performance refers to the manifestation of that ability through which competence can be developed and evaluated.

Although these characteristics clarify the concept of competence, they do not refer to how Communicative Competence can be developed.

In regard to this concern, Savignon goes further to explain the four components of Communicative Competence, proposed by Canale and Swain (Savignon. S., 1983; 2002): grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Savignon (2001, 2002) expressed that grammatical competence is the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactical and phonological features of a language and use them to interpret and form words and sentences. It is the equivalent of the linguistic Competence proposed by Chomsky in which the importance is given to the sentence and its well-formedness (Savignon, 1983). However, it is not aimed towards the ability to state a rule but the ability to use the explicit rules in the process of communication.

Discourse competence, on the other hand, aims to structure or understand a meaningful piece of communication (e.g., the recognition of theme or topic of a paragraph, chapter, book, poem, television commercial, legal document or telephone conversation). It also intends to recognize the

connections that exist between words or sentences and to infer meanings according to the context.

Savignon (1983, 2001, and 2002), states that there are two concepts that are related to discourse competence: coherence and cohesion. Text coherence consists on the relationship of all sentences or utterances that assemble a global idea in a text. It depends on cohesion which refers to the local connections or structural links between sentences to provide flow in a text.

In summary, discourse competence, as Savignon explains (12983) is the ability to interpret sentences or utterances in order to form a meaningful whole and to achieve coherent texts that are relevant to a given context.

Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use language appropriately in a given communicative context, taking into account the roles of the participants, the setting, and the purpose of the interaction.

Strategic competence, on the other hand, is the ability to compensate the imperfect knowledge of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules by using effective strategies to enhance communication. However, the importance of strategic competence decreases with the improvement of the others competences.

The relationship between all the components of Communicative Competence is not completely obvious; it

depends mostly on the learner's experience in his/her first language. In relation to this problem, Savignon puts forward an inverted pyramid (see in Savignon, 1983, 2001, and 2002) where she presents how all components interact in Communicative Competence. As stated by Savignon, all components are interrelated and cannot be developed or measured in isolation (i.e., an increase in one area produces a corresponding increase in overall Communicative Competence).

Taking into consideration all of this theory, the MEN proposed a communicative view of language based on the development of Communicative Competence for English teaching. Then, ICFES also took this concept and included it in the structure of its test but their conceptions are not completely clear.

For this reason, the next part of this paper is concerned clarify their concepts and theories, identifying some strong points as well as difficulties ICFES and MEN have in management of competence and the assessment they are implementing.

As believed by the MEN (1999), everyone develops Communicative Competence in his/her first language, therefore language teaching must promote this competence to communicate in other languages as they do in their mother tongue, managing some limitations that they could have. As a

result, the fundamental purpose in foreign language teaching in our country is to make students acquire and develop their competence in order to use the target language to comprehend the surrounding reality and share ideas, feelings and opinions in different communicative situations.

According to the MEN the Communicative Competence must emerge from a language teaching practice based on the view of language as dynamic structure whose linguistic elements (i.e., phonetic, phonologic, morphosintactic and semantic elements) are independent, but for a successful communication they must be taken as a whole, revealing a deep and complex relationship between language and thoughts, language and feelings, language and action, language and learning, language and culture. (MEN, 1984:40; cited in ICFES, 2004)

The ICFES on its account understands competence as the knowledge in which people reflect their own abilities to comprehend the world, relating their previous knowledge with their ability to solve and understand problems in real situations. (ICFES, 2004)

As maintained by Lyle Bachman (1993, cited in ICFES, 2004), the ICFES elected a structure of evaluation in which the language competence is divided into two main components: linguistic and pragmatic competence.

Linguistic competence includes grammatical, textual competence and textual coherence. The Grammatical Competence implies the knowledge of vocabulary, rules, form and function of words, structures of a sentence, as well as the recognition of meanings.

Textual Competence is the ability to combine ideas and get cohesion in order to form a meaningful textual unit. Textual Coherence, on the other hand, is aimed to establish logic sequences in the development of ideas in order to give sense to a text.

Pragmatic Competence comprehends illocutive and sociolinguistic competence. The illocutive competence is seen as the ability of managing a language to satisfy communicative purposes. It recognizes the different speaker's intentions in specific communicative situations. Sociolinguistic competence, on its account, seeks the use of the foreign language considering diverse communicative contexts that include different speech acts.

This theory presents some strengths, first of all because the objectives proposed for foreign languages focus on a more functional view of language, rather than a merely study of isolated grammatical structures. Students can also demonstrate their knowledge within real contextualized communicative situations.

In addition, Linguistic competence is taken as the most important base of the Language Competence. As stated by Savignon (1983, 2001, 2002) and Hymes (cited in Savignon, 1983), it is necessary to know the linguistic code in order to communicate in a speech community.

However, the extensive focus on Linguistic competence has not allowed the development of the other competences which has hindered the attainment of a Communicative Competence.

Besides, the MEN does not include strategic competence as a tool to deal with all types of communicative problems, which is something that Savignon (1983, 2001, 2002) has considered as an important element when learning a new language.

The techniques the MEN implements to assess the language methodology are based on developing a written ability, without little emphasis on context or real situations. In fact, it seems impossible to demonstrate Communicative Competence in a text with a pencil and paper format.

As Doshika and Katheleen (1996) argue, tests that assess Communicative Competence must measure how students are able to use a language in real life situations and must reflect the way language is going to be used in real

communication. They emphasize on the appropriateness rather than the well-formedness of sentences.

The MEN also talks about a "coherent methodology" but, according to Hymes (1972; ICFES, 2004) the development of Communicative Competence is determined in terms of communicative interaction. The Communicative Competence is rather a result of the use of language; it is not a consequence of the precise curricular programs with a teacher completely dependent on a textbook.

Consequently, working on competences is not something that can be studied through theory; it becomes reality when it is put into practice in real context through interaction.

As Doshika and Katheleen (1996) conclude, the basic idea of Communicative Competence remains the ability to use language, both receptively and productively.

Therefore, competence as Savignon, Hymes, Bogoya, Halliday, Canale and Swain claim, refers to how someone performs the language using the linguistic code effectively in different contexts, taking knowledge to interact with others.

Testing Communicative Competence

When we talk about testing we refer to a set of explicit and structured procedures and techniques to measure the students' outcomes in the foreign language.

As stated by Brown (2004) a test always must measure the student's performance in order to make some assumptions of his/her competence. That's the reason why Savignon claims the importance of creating tests of Communicative Competence which not only test the ability to manage grammar rules but also all the abilities involved when interacting with others.

As Oller (1979, in ICFES, 2004) states, language competence is not a set of separated abilities, (knowing grammar rules, applying them, memorizing vocabulary, listening, speaking…)it is global concept composed by interacting abilities that are used when someone is trying to getting his/her meaning across. Therefore, language competence can not be tested in additive tests of separated items.

Concerning this issue, Savignon (1983) states the importance of integrative and global tests which are aimed to measure the global knowledge students have in the foreign or second language. Examples of these kinds of tests are cloze tests and dictations.

Bachman and Palmer (1996, in ICFES, 2004), on her account, emphasize on the importance of creating tests where there is a correspondence between test performance and language use, that is authentic tests. In relation to this Savignon (1983) concludes stating four main characteristics

of a valid test of Communicative Competence. First of all,
it must assess how a person negotiates meaning in dynamic
interactions. It can not only test written language but also
spoken, paralinguistic and nonverbal communication. It must
be "context specific" and must measure what students can
really do.

Conceptual framework

The information of our research considers the views on
Communicative Competence that Sandra Savignon and Dell Hymes
set forward. These views establish Communicative Competence
as an element related to the ability to use the language,
not only in its forms and accuracy, but also considering the
use of the L2 appropriately according to the context.
Savignon proposes four components, which develop
simultaneously and one according to the other, because a
Communicative Competence is the result of all its components
interacting each other when communication is taken place.

This research is also based on all the proposals of
the "Ministerio de Educación Nacional" (MEN) and the
"Instituto Colombiano para el fomento de la Educación
Superior" (ICFES), whose new guidelines for English teaching
are focused on the development of the Communicative
Competence and its assessment.

This new emphasis on communication has attempted to
give language teaching in our country a change in

methodology, but the problem is that, according to what is observed in the ICFES test results, in Colombia Communicative Competence is still seen as developing isolated skills and there is not an integration of all its components. On the other hand, assessment has as a goal a preparation for the ICFES test, which is not embedded in a communicative trend that considers authenticity, context, the interaction involved when negotiating meaning as well as written, spoken, paralinguistic and nonverbal communication.

Contextual Framework

The Language Center of the University of Nariño

In 1961, as a result of the resolution N. 12 of October 24th, "El Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas" was created as a part of the Faculty of Education. This institute offered to the University the possibility of having a place where different languages could be taught to improve thus, the quality of education that was purveyed. The languages offered to the public were English, French, Italian and German.

Nevertheless, the institute began to suffer some problems and the directives decided to do a complete restructuring that included an increase in the number of teachers and the creation of the Department of Modern Languages.

This new department was in charge of teaching the languages to other programs and also offering additional services to the public.

Some years later, the Educational Faculty was restructured and the emerging Department of Modern Languages joined the Faculty of Human Sciences and changed its name to "Department of Linguistics and Languages".

Due to this change, the "Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas" continued its restructuring. Teachers and directives negotiated in the Consejo Superior and through the resolution 158 of Novemer 25th 1993, it changed its name to "Language Center" which offered courses to the faculty's programs and to the general public. New equipment was facilitated and the number of students increased gradually.

Nowadays the Language Center is composed by 63 teachers that offer their services to a number of around 2000 students from the general public and students from different programs of the University of Nariño and Liceo de la Universidad.

Vision of Language Center

The Language Center as a unit of the University of Nariño will be an academic entity that will provide space for research in new pedagogical advances and methodological aspects of language teaching and training to provide

students the knowledge of other languages to be communicatively competent in a specific foreign language.

Mission of the Language Center

The Language Center aims to promote the learning of foreign languages through a communicative methodology to develop the basic abilities to be communicatively competent in the other language.

Definition of terms

Communicative Competence

It is the tacit knowledge and ability to use the language in a social context, to observe social linguistic norms of appropriateness. (Hymes, 1971; cited in Savignon. S., 2002). According to Savignon (1983), "it is the functional language proficiency; the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons belonging to the same (or different) speech community (communities), or between one person and a written or oral text" [p.p 303].

Competence – based language teaching (CBLT).

It is an alternative to the use of objectives in program planning. CBLT focuses on what learners should be able to do at the end of a course of instruction. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001)

Curricular Lineaments.

They are the educational rules concerned with the language learning, in which the issues are presented in order to identify what are the laws that control the foreign language learning and teaching. In that way, these laws emphasize the necessity to acquire at least one foreign language beginning with Elementary Level. (Nunan, 2001)

Discourse competence.

It is the ability to read and comprehend meaningful pieces of communication and/or to produce coherent texts. (Savignon, 2002)

Discrete-point tests

Tests that measure specific abilities or language items. (Savignon, 1983)

Grammatical Competence.

It refers to manage formal structures of language. It allows using and comprehending the structures of the target language in order to communicate meanings. It consists on vocabulary, rules of pronunciation and spelling, form and function of words, structures of a sentence (morphosyntactic aspects), and recognition of meanings (semantic aspects). (Savignon, 2002)

Illocutive Competence.

It is seen as the ability of a person managing a language to satisfy communicative purposes. It recognizes

the different speaker's intentions in specific communicative situations. (Savignon, 2002)

Objectives.

Objectives in the research of competence are concerned with the attainment of specified standards rather than with an individual's achievement in relation to a group. Objectives are therefore criterion rather than norm – referenced. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001)

Linguistic competence.

It refers to the knowledge of the linguistic code of a language and its appropriate use. (Savignon, 1983)

Performance.

Performance refers to the observable act, the manifestation of the communicative ability through which competence can be developed, maintained and evaluated. (Rod, 1994)

Sociolinguistic competence.

It refers to the ability to use the language in an appropriate communicative context. (Savignon, 2001)

Strategic competence.

It is the ability to compensate or deal with the imperfect knowledge in the target language. (Savignon, 2002)

Textual Coherence.

It addresses the efficacy to establish logic sequences in the development of ideas, to give sense to the created

text. This concept explores relations and logic-semantic connections in communicative events. (Savignon, 1983)

Technique.

A particular device, strategy, activity used to accomplish an immediate goal. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001)

Test.

A set of procedures and techniques used to measure the students' abilities to make inferences about the more general competence of an individual when performing a specific task. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001)

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Population and sample

    Population.

    The population of this study was composed by English teachers who work at the Language Center (63 teachers).

    Sample.

    Due to the difficulty to got the information from observations that were difficult to apply to the whole population, it was necessary to take into account a sample of 15 teachers which was determined by the following the formulae:

$$n= \frac{Z^2pqN}{Ne^2+Z^2pq}$$

    Where n: sample size; Z= confidence level 10%; p: positive variability (.50); q: negative variability (.50); N: population size (63 teachers); and e= precision or error (0.5))

Design and research type

    Design

    According to the acquisition of the whole information and the coherence with the objectives, this research was not experimental since it was not focused on applying a treatment and it does not involve the use of control groups.

Research type

This research was descriptive, because the goal was to determine the way teachers conceive the teaching and assessment of Communicative Competence at the Language Center and to find out what concepts regarding Communicative Competence they are familiar with. On the other hand this research was quantitative because it made use of surveys to obtain systematic and objective information about Communicative Competence, as a phenomenon in education settings and the results of the surveys were analyzed according to frequency.

This research also had a qualitative orientation since the information provided by teachers along with the results of the observations allowed the researchers to decide on which suggestions were the most relevant to enhance the comprehension and implementation of an approach that favors the development of Communicative Competence and its adequate assessment inside the classroom.

Data gathering procedure

This study made use of surveys, distributed to teachers in courses at the Language Center; at the end of the process only 32 surveys were gotten out of 63. Moreover, 8 interviews were also conducted in order to know what the teachers think about the assessment of competences. Finally 15 teachers chosen at random (see sample page 42) were

observed to determine whether or not the information
provided by teachers was true, how their students react
towards the activities and the methods they are implementing
and monitor their performance in the foreign language to
find out the success of teachers' strategies. The
information was analyzed, compare and interpreted through
percentages and a short analysis followed each set of
percentages to clarify results.

Administrative aspects

Activities timeline

ACTIVITIES	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dic	Jan	Feb	Mar	Abr	May	Jun
Preliminary project	→→→									
bibliographic collection		→→→								
Project				→→						
Instrument design						→→				
Project revision literature analysis								→→		
Data gathering									→→	
Data analysis										→→
Final report										→→

Budget

ITEM	COST
Paper, includes: photocopies, sheets of paper.	$ 200.000
Fingering includes: ink.	$ 100.000
Books.	$ 150.000
Cassettes, batteries.	$ 20.000
Transport.	$ 50.000
Final report.	$ 50.000
Hardcover.	$ 100.000
Presentation materials.	$ 100.000
Total	$ 770.000

Budget

ITEM	COST
Paper, includes: photocopies, sheets of paper.	$ 200.000
Fingering includes: ink.	$ 100.000

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The information was analyzed through percentages to finally interpret that data according to the general theory and research regarding Communicative Competence. Analysis and interpretation of surveys applied in the Language Center of the University of Nariño

Analysis

SURVEYS

TECHNIQUE CARD

- UNIVERSITY OF NARIÑO
- School of human Sciences
- Linguistics and Languages department
- B.A. English and French teaching.
- Study object: monograph project
- Objective: to describe and understand how teachers work in the Language Center, regarding competency-based assessment.
- Sources: Students-teachers, and teachers.
- Number of teachers in the Language Center: 63
- Techniques or tools: Surveys applied to a certain number of teachers who represent the bigger part of the population that is 32 surveys, 15 observations and 8 interviews (due to teachers' time, it was pretty difficult to do more of them).
- Period of investigation : April and May 2006.

After applying surveys to 32 teachers who belong to the Language Center at the University of Nariño the teachers' answers were analyzed. Their opinions and statements and their analysis are presented ahead. The questions of this survey attempted to inquire about all the aspects that lie beneath the concept of Communicative Competence such as skills, assessment and appropriacy, but focusing on asking about the translation of that concept into practice.

The first category presented in the survey was grammar and how teachers work with it inside the classroom. The question was:

1. Do you promote the use of English in class?
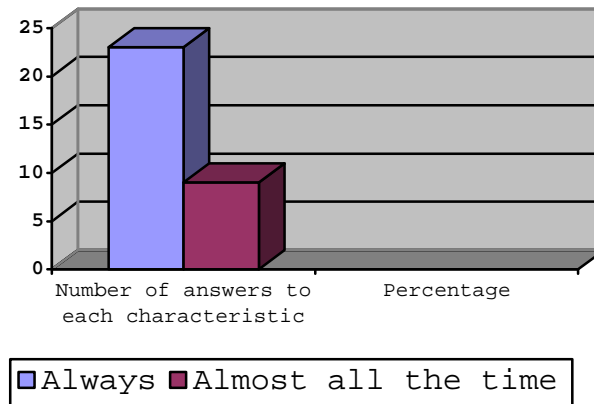
To this question, teachers in the Language Center answered that they always speak and make their students speak in English because they recognize the importance of getting students exposed to it.

When they were asked why they promoted the use of English in their classes, they highlighted the fact that the Language Center has as a goal to promote the development of Communicative Competence inside the classroom; therefore it is their responsibility to provide as much input as they can to their students. Nevertheless, teachers stated that depending on the level, the first language can be rarely used especially to clarify meaning.

2.   Teaching grammatical aspect in the development of Communicative Competence

After knowing information regarding the use of English inside the classroom, teachers were asked if they are teaching grammatical aspects of the language. They stated that in their classes they do not focus on grammar but sometimes they teach it. Few teachers admitted to always work with a focus on the grammatical system.

In relation to the way and the strategies they present the grammatical items to their students, none of the teachers said that they taught grammar through specific rules and most of them affirmed that they introduced grammar in context, through reading, examples or using different kinds of materials.

3.   Mastery and formulation of rules.

Do you consider that working on competences implies the mastery and formulation of rules?
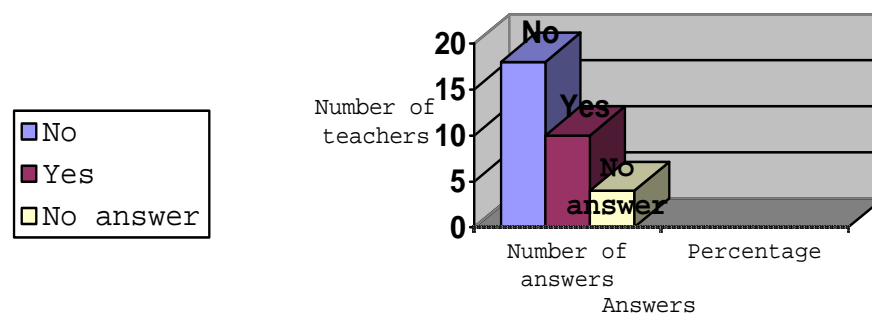

When teachers were asked about the importance of teaching grammatical rules to English learners, they asserted that the mastery of formulation of rules is not important,

they concluded saying that it is better to keep students involved in the process of learning by inferring rules in order to analyze the purpose and meaning of each structure.

Nonetheless some teachers think that rules are important to speak or write accurately and being understood, the way to present them is what must be different, students have to be able to understand the meaning by themselves instead of being given the rule by the teacher.

4. How do teachers introduce the class – topic?
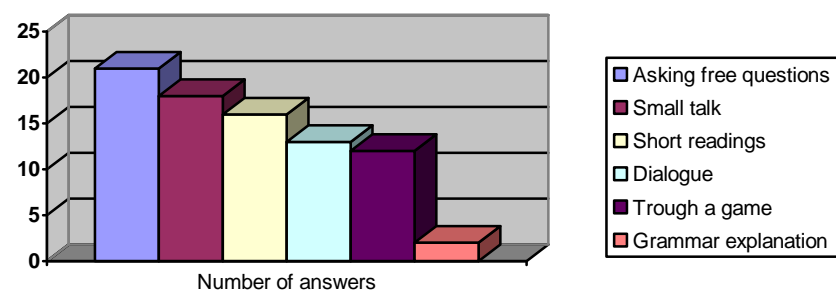
The answers demonstrate that the preferred technique used by teachers to introduce a new item is by asking free questions so students can understand and assimilate a new topic. Teachers chose and added a variety of activities to introduce the class, giving students the opportunity to explore their learning strategies and to practice different language skills, such as speaking or reading. According to the answers provided by the teachers, they came up with the importance of assessing and develop oral production, giving primacy to productive skills.

5.   What activities do teachers develop inside the classroom to practice the foreign language?
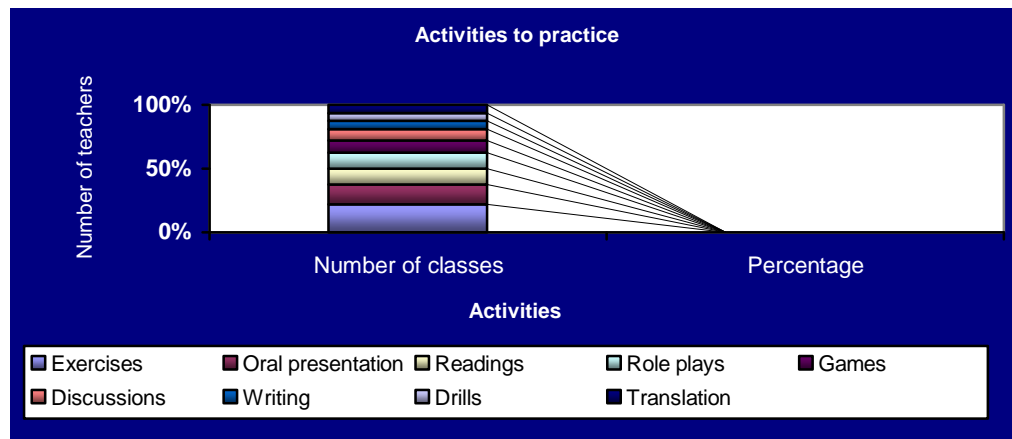

To the question about the kind of activities teachers develop inside the classroom to practice, 7 teachers among the 32 teachers asked asserted that the most widespread activity to practice any topic is using written exercises to practice mostly grammar. Similarly activities like oral presentation, reading and role plays were also taken into account by some of them (3 out of 32). Writing, drills and translation were the less used by teachers according to the results gotten from the surveys. According to the analysis, it can be seen that teachers implement written activities as well as speaking practice.

When they were asked which of them are the most successful, 11 out of 32 teachers selected activities which aim to oral production such as oral presentations and discussions. Drills and exercises also placed a great importance as well as reading and writing which got the same

score. Translation was the activity that got the lower score according to teachers since it is consider as a non productive and meaningful activity.

According to this information, it can be inferred that teachers pinpoint oral skills when teaching a foreign language. In terms of success they said that through speaking, students can participate without feeling forced to do it.

6. What do teachers think the role of teaching translation is in language learning?
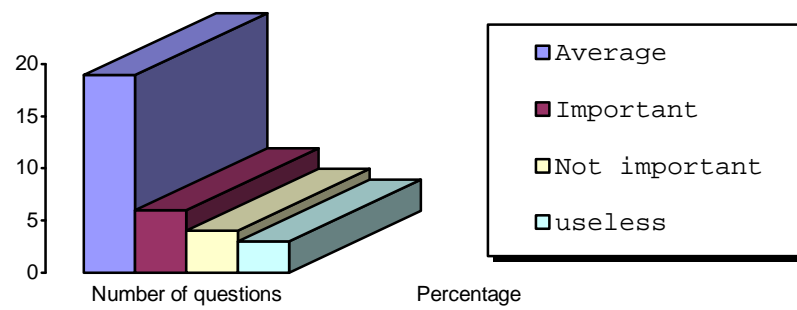
According to teachers, the importance of translation in language learning is neither important nor useless, that is, it has a medium importance in teaching a foreign language. Even when teachers know that the main goal of the Language Center is to assess Communicative Competence there are still people who think translation is important so they admitted having applied different translation methods to carry out a new topic. Teachers recognized that translation cannot be avoided, but there are different ways to explain foreign words in an EFL class.

7.   The development of skills in language learning.

In order to find out what is the focus in terms of skills in the English classes at the Language Center, teachers were asked about which skills they mainly promote in their classes by assigning a value to each item, being 5 the most important and 1 less important.

The skill that got the highest score among teachers is speaking. Almost all the teachers agreed with highlighting the oral production in students, that is teachers promote verbal communication during the development of the class. Then reading, listening and writing. However teachers show that they are developing all the skills giving emphasis in almost all of them, that's why there were skills that obtained the same category in the rank.

8.   Do teachers develop reading comprehension skills?

To the question if they develop reading comprehension skills, most of the teachers said that they almost always make their students work on this important aspect of the language; however they just know some few techniques to use it inside the classroom to improve that competence. According to their answers, many of them make students read and answer some few questions orally or written although there are other options like paraphrase the passage which could make students use the target language more and being able to demonstrate if they have understood the reading.

9.   Do teachers devote some time to teach how sentences must be coherently linked?

To this questions teachers concluded that teaching linking words is important when developing writing skills, in order for students to write comprehensible ideas, avoiding writing unacceptable sentences and producing coherent paragraph.

As stated by most of the teachers in the surveys, for the 78.1% of the total of survey takers, coherence competence, (i.e., the ability to connect sentences coherently) is very important when teaching a new language. It can be observed that most teachers agreed on the idea that reading has to be considered when teaching writing. Teachers said that teaching how to connect coherently sentences helps students to be understood and make sense of the language they are producing in a proper way. According to their answers, reading activities can become a very useful tool for teachers as well for students, especially when trying to present something learned in context, so students identify the real use of what they learned.

4 teachers out of 32 said that this competence is not important to teach, but they did not supply reasons why. On the other hand 3 teachers expressed not to have understood the question.

10. What type of strategies do teachers teach to their students to compensate the lack of knowledge in the foreign language?

When teachers were asked about this question in order to identify how they work the strategic competence and if they implement it in their classes they said that the most used strategy by them in the Language Center is paraphrasing. They also named repletion and guessing as strategies they teach and help their students to communicate more effectively. However, there is a wide range of other possibilities teachers mentioned they teach students to deal with the interlingua such as Real context, Patterns, drills, Mimic, inferring meaning from context, drama, examples, ask questions to clarify, drawings, comparisons, inference and vocabulary learning.

Developing Sociolinguistic Competence

Teachers were asked if they give students the information about cultural appropriacy of the new vocabulary they present them or if they teach them slang, foul language, idioms, informal vs. formal style of language, expression and so on. To this question they claimed that they sometimes work on this aspect of the language, whereas few of them admitted not to work at all or rarely present it during their classes. So it can be concluded that most of the teachers understand the importance of the pragmatic competence in language

teaching, although, as indicated by their answers, they do not normally teach that important aspect in all their classes.

Assessment Issues

Teachers were questioned about the activities they mainly use to assess their students' learning. The graph below shows teacher's inclinations in assessment techniques.

A

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Assessment activities

Number of teachers

30
20
10
0

☐ Oral test   ■ Written test   ☐ Presentation
☐ worksheet   ■ Multiple choice test ■ Readings
■ Writing assign
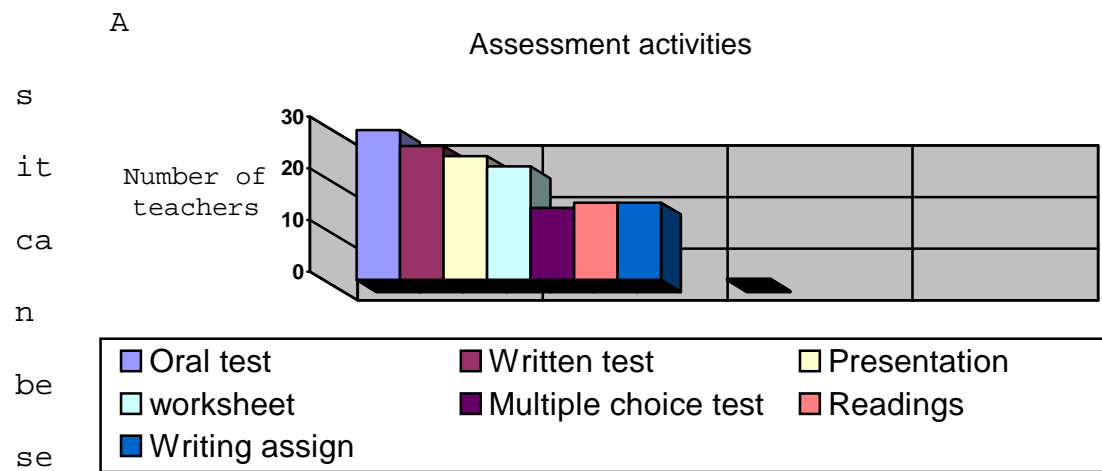
en in the chart above, according to teachers' answers, oral tests are a well-liked instrument by them as well as written tests, giving special attention to formal assessment. Oral presentations are also a very common strategy among teachers in the Language Center, which shows a big emphasis on oral production. Then worksheets, multiple choice tests, readings and writing assignments are also used to assess student's learning but they are not so frequent.

These results show the tendencies teachers have in assessment tasks, for example, the big importance they are

giving to production rather than on receptive skills. It is also seen that teachers are not using other strategies of informal assessment. They are giving primacy to the formal types of test, such as oral and written exams or quizzes giving no attention to other ways to assess students like portfolios or other forms of alternative and authentic assessment.

Observation analysis

In order to triangulate information about how Communicative Competence is implemented in communicative courses at the Language Center, an additional instrument was needed. It was decided that carrying out observations in some classes would help us clarify if the answers obtained in the surveys completed by teachers matched the actual procedure of the English class. Below, it can be seen the type of audience chosen and the most suitable conclusions for each question.

Time: 4 – 6 p.m.

Place: Language Center of the University of Nariño

Period A 2006

Different age range from different levels:

Level I (teenagers): 17 students whose ages range from15-17 years

Level II (children): 13 students who are in theirs eights (8's)

Level III (children: 11 students who are about 7 and 9 years old

Level IV (teenagers): 18 students whose ages range from 13 to 15.

Level V (teenagers): 12 students they are 16 years old.

Level V (adults): 10 students; most of them were in their twenties, although there were 5 students whose age was from 35 to 40.

The courses to be observed were chosen at random.

The following items were the parameters considered during the observation:

1. The content teacher presents is related to
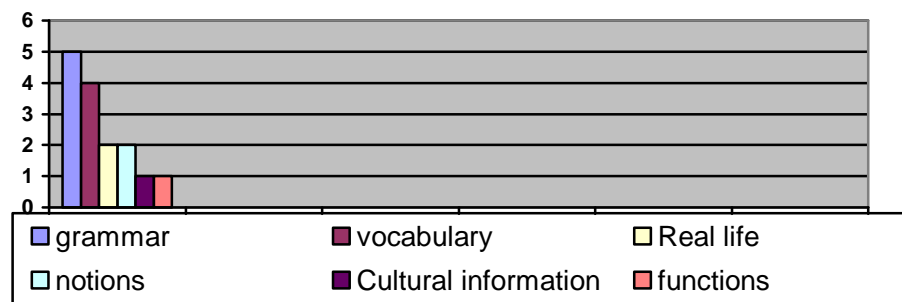
When the different teachers were visited it was easy to realize that most of the teachers emphasized on the grammatical aspect and vocabulary, making students figure out grammatical explanations. Nevertheless, some teachers tried to look at the notions and get students involved when presenting real life situations.

1.1 How does the teacher introduce the topic of the class?
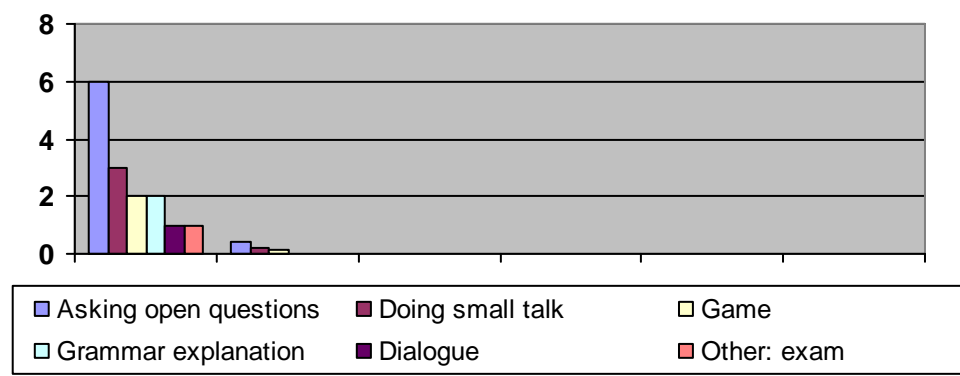
The most common way to set up a new topic in the class was by asking free questions so students did not feel pressure to speak in public.

In six classes, teachers started their classes giving primacy to oral production through small talks where the teacher asked open-ended questions so students could freely express what they thought in the target language.

1.2 According to the teacher method, how good is his/her performance?

In the classes observed, teachers' performance was Good, taking into account their method, they applied strategies and techniques: According to student's level and academic needs, choosing the most appropriate one depending on the audience they are working with. Besides, most of the teachers knew how to deal with the learning process.

 Additionally, they used different kinds of materials and activities to improve students' learning.

In one of the classes observed, there was a teacher whose English ability was too advanced for beginners, so

sometimes the teacher spoke using new vocabulary getting
students confused.

Finally, it was observed that many discipline problems
affected the environment in the classroom and sometimes that
was not controlled properly by the teacher.

1.3 What kind of materials does the teacher use?
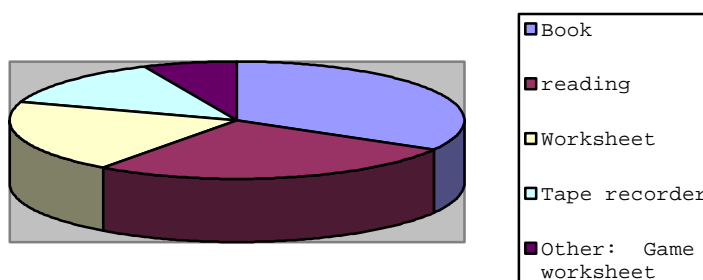
According to what was seen during the observation, we
could realize that even when teachers are aware of the
importance of implementing extra material, they continue
using their books as the main aid in teaching.

It was also observed that most of the teachers did not
bring additional material, they just worked on the course
book, doing the exercises and readings; they did not use any
other source to make students practice or to present the
grammar point to them.

1.3.1 How does the teacher use them?

Taking into account the materials teachers brought to
the class and the way they were worked with, it was observed
that each teacher had his/her own way to use and apply their

knowledge; however it could be seen that filling the gaps and answering questions were the preferred techniques.

Although each teacher applied a different method, all teachers used the materials in a similar way because the most common material among teachers was the course book. The most common strategies were: reading aloud, asking comprehension questions and doing the exercises presented on the book then, checking the answers in group to give further explanations.

1.3.2 Are the materials successful in terms of eliciting abundant and accurate English Production?

The observations were done in different levels with students of different ages and different academic needs.

So the following could be concluded:

In general, the materials in terms of practice were not successful, because students tended not to talk; they did not seem to be motivated, they did not seem to pay attention and they did not practice either orally, or in writing. In some courses, some learners were completely lost, they did not know even what the teacher was talking about or working on, so they did not participate actively in the class.

In most English classes, students seemed to be shy, they provided just the information required and were using almost all the time the mother tongue because they felt confused and not confident to express themselves in the target language,

since they had limited vocabulary and made too many
grammatical mistakes.

　　　　Nonetheless, in some classes, it seemed that kids
enjoyed a game-like activity, so most learners wanted to
participate and practice the topic taught, but not everybody.
Some of them seemed not to be interested in the game because
it was addressed to repeating isolated words or sentences
mechanically, so there was no language production.

　　　　1.4 Is a part of the class devoted to oral and/or
written practice in the L2?

Practice inside the class

Frequency

10
5
0

Options

Yes   No
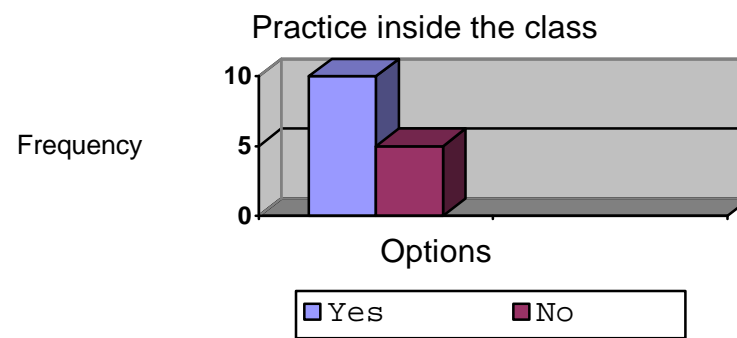
　　　　The average time devoted to practice the L2 was not very
long if we consider that the classes should be two hours
long. It can be said that teachers devoted between 15 and 30
minutes to practice English.

1.4.1 Which activities are developed inside the classroom to practice the foreign language?

Activities to practice
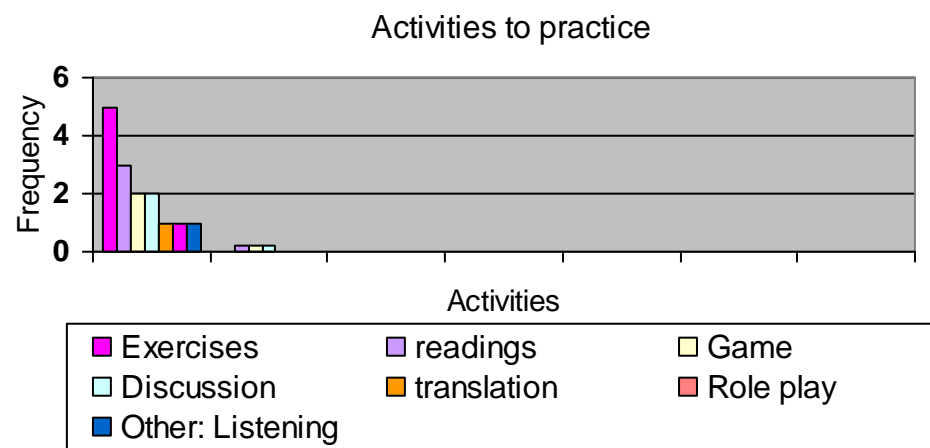
In order to make students practice what they learned in class, teachers provided different kinds of exercises.

During their classes, teachers used different kinds of activities, trying to vary the pace and focus of the class. The most typical activities were: worksheets, readings, games, discussion, role plays and translation.

1.4.2 What is the students' attitude towards the activity?

The students' attitudes towards the activities developed by the teachers, depended on the learner's level and age.

In advanced levels learners enjoyed oral performances, they produced longer sentences and were willing to participate. However in some classes the activities were not addressed to the students' level, these exercises led, according to what was observed to boredom, stress, confusion, and misunderstanding so students took the easy way out and

they did not solve the exercises. Instead, they did something else; they wrote and said things in Spanish or just remained quiet.

In lower levels, students did what the teacher asked them to do but they felt afraid when the teacher asked them to say something.

In one of the classrooms the teacher seemed to be aggressive when students made grammar and/or pronunciation mistakes so this attitude made students feel stressed out and the participation was especially low.

When they were involved in a game activity, learners, especially kids, were excited and noisy.

Additionally, it can be said that, students were completely interested and willing to speak but only when a grade was provided.

1.4.3 Is the practice effective in terms of the amount and quality of the language produced?

Generally, students seemed to start the class with an interest to participate and do the exercises so they struggled to produce an accurate and fluent language. But, as the classes advanced, most of the activities did not help English learners to elicit communication in the foreign language and the learners' interest started to decline.

In elementary and intermediate levels, learners presented some difficulties with some grammatical items,

because they did not understand them very well. As a result, students seemed to be quiet and confused during the whole class, it is interesting to note that despite not understanding the task, the learners did not ask questions and preferred to ask their classmates in Spanish instead of interacting with the teacher.

On the other hand, in advanced levels, students tried to give a good range of oral production, but they made a lot of mistakes even though when most of the topics were supposedly already seen.

As it can be realized, the practice in terms of the amount and quality of the language produced was not completely effective. Furthermore, Communicative Competence was not clearly seen in some of the classrooms at the Language Center, despite the fact that in the surveys teachers advocated the use of communicative elements. In some classes observed, learners did not produce language or used it with communicative purpose, such as asking for clarification or answering teacher's questions. The learners' output was oriented towards asking display and authentic questions, but not to communicate in the classroom.

2. Interaction.

2.1 The class is carried out:

Mostly English

Mostly Spanish

Half English half Spanish

Totally English
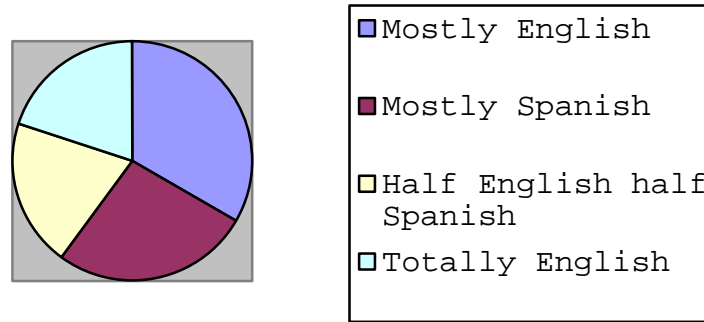
Even when students belonged to advanced levels, teachers needed to speak in Spanish so that students could understand and acquire the new topic. Nonetheless, it was very satisfying to observe that many teachers made real use of the target language; they talked mostly in English trying to involve students when practicing a certain topic.

On the other hand, it could be seen that four teachers out of 15 overused Spanish unnecessarily, since they almost always translated what they said, thus, students did not pay attention when the teacher was speaking in English, they just waited for the translation.

There were few cases that were different, mixing the L1 and the L2: one teacher used the target language almost all the time in a very comprehensible and effective way, so students understood everything and when they needed clarification the teacher used Spanish just to clarify meaning, but the use of the L1 was very scarce and limited to some situations.

2.2 Teacher interacts in the foreign language
with:

The whole class	A group of students	One student
10	3	2
66.66%	20%	13.33%

There was not a lot of interaction among students and
teacher. Teachers were speaking all the time without allowing
students interact, which is definitely not a characteristic
of classrooms in which Communicative Competence is being
implemented. Teachers hardly tried to interact with the whole
class by making questions and explaining to all of them and
in some cases asking for certain information. In a few
cases, the learners answered in English but most of the time
they answered in Spanish and the teachers did not react
towards this situation demanding students to use the target
language instead of the mother tongue.

2.3 Students use the target language to:
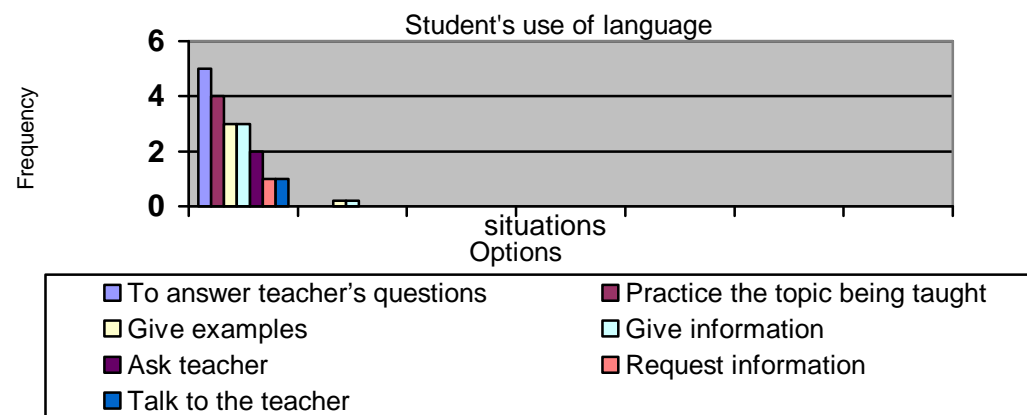
Students hardly ever used the target language unless the teacher asked them something. Learners used the target language when reading examples from the book, despite some exceptions when they were pushed to use classroom language and they tried hard to use the language, but in most of the cases when they required clarification on the part of the teacher, needed something or wanted to express ideas not taken literally from a boo, students used Spanish. They did the same when they were asked what they considered to be difficult questions. Again, it was observed that most teachers did not react to this situation and they did not push learners to use the L2.

2.4 The class activities are developed in :

Whole class	Pair work	Individual w.	Group w.
6	4	3	2
40%	16.66%	20%	13.33%

Teachers introduced variety in their classes by moving from whole group activities to pair work and individual work. What is interesting is that, although the organization of the class varied, the activities remained the same. Teachers tended to tell students to do the assigned exercises from the book and students worked as they wanted, in groups, individually or with a classmate. The directions provided by teacher did not specify how learners had to work.

3 Working on competences

3.1 Is the development of the Communicative
Competence evident along the classes?
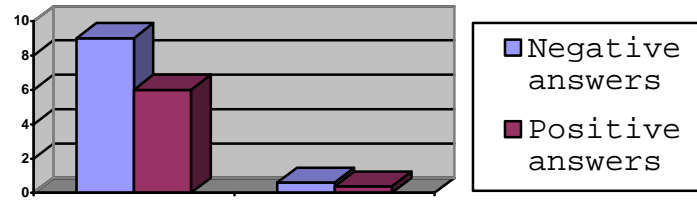
Analyzing teacher's activities and strategies and students' performance, it was observed that very few of the courses observed in this research were developing Communicative Competence. It was not evident that learners communicated and interacted in the target language. English learners almost never used English to request information, to use classroom language, or even to answer simple questions.

When they were forced to give an answer in English, (that was the only way they used the L2) the language they produced was not fluent and comprehensible enough, they did not feel confident to express themselves in the target language and the use of grammar was not accurately developed which did not allow them to give comprehensible ideas.

3.2 Which skills and components are mainly developed in the class?
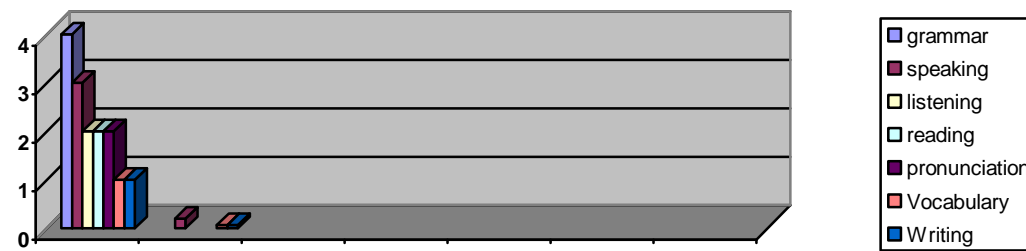
The teachers observed attempted to focus on different skills and components of English, and were moving from one skill to another and trying to combine them in their classes, changing activities from reading to listening, speaking and grammar. However, grammar and speaking were the most common skills in the classes observed.

During the time of observation, most of the teachers were explaining grammar or developing an activity to practice it, as a result, it can be stated that in general, most of the teachers emphasized on grammar aspects by doing exercises, providing grammar explanations, due to the lack of understanding and the need to continue with the topics proposed by the book.

3.2.1 If grammar is introduced, how is grammar presented? Does the strategy seem to contribute to develop grammatical competence?

Explicit way	Implicit way	Trough rules	No answer
6	3	3	3
40%	26.66%	20%	13.33%

Observing different teachers, during a whole class, it was seen that teachers almost all the time presented and introduced the grammar in an explicit way; sometimes they provided grammar explanations in Spanish and some teachers in English. Three teachers tried to present it in a context, a reading taken from the book mainly, but at the end they provided the grammar explanation.

According to what was seen, the strategy teachers were using to introduce and/or teach grammar contributed to develop the grammatical competence because students understood the grammar points and practiced it in context. In one of the rooms checked, students interacted with the teacher in the foreign language, which was very satisfying to observe. The learners had a basic level, they were beginners, but they seemed to have been given the adequate tools to interact in the class, use the L2 and make a meaningful use of what they were learning in the Language Center.

3.3 When students are speaking or writing, do they produce or attempt to produce a fluent and coherent discourse?

Rarely	never	sometimes
6	5	4
40%	33.33%	26.66%

According to the observations, in most of the classes, the grammatical competence was not successfully developed. Despite the fact that, as it was mentioned before, classes are focused mostly on grammar, students showed difficulties when speaking and or writing with some simple grammatical aspects. They could not use the grammar correctly or express themselves using the simplest structures in an accurate way, which is an important problem. Given the importance assigned by teachers to grammar, learners should have shown higher levels of accuracy when using the L2.

3.4 Does the teacher present new vocabulary taking into account the cultural appropriacy of some items (slang, foul language)?

When teachers were observed they never told their students the appropriacy of some vocabulary taught, they never told them in which contexts of the L2 was correct to use the new expressions, or if the words were formal or informal. Teachers were not teaching them slang, idioms or expressions of authentic language that they might encounter

in daily life situations. Teachers also presented the
vocabulary in an isolated way, without a context, and
basically focusing on the vocabulary present in the textbook,
which may explain the lack of authentic language.
Nevertheless, in 3 English classes teachers did present this
aspect giving a short explanation of the new words, if they
were formal or informal and when they could use them,
providing learners with appropriate examples, contextualizing
new vocabulary and giving learners cultural information about
the expressions.

    3.4.1 Which are the weaknesses students present when
producing language?

    During the observations, many problems were observed
although the difficulties were not totally evident because
students almost all the time spoke in Spanish and therefore,
there was little production in the L2; this avoidance in the
use of English hindered the collection of information on the
learners' use of language. However, it could be said that
using Spanish most of the time is an indicator of the
learners' level of proficiency.

    The most common problem students presented when they
were producing language in an orally or written way was the
need to translate everything into Spanish that was the reason
why they hardly ever understood what they were listening to
or reading. The same problem happened when they wanted to

produce language because they were translating word by word from Spanish to English, making many mistakes and producing a non fluent language.

Furthermore, students had a lot of difficulties with the range of vocabulary they had, many students did not use the appropriate words or sometimes they spoke in Spanish because they did not know the word in English. In this case the teacher always helped them telling the word but they never taught them how they could express the same idea in different words or paraphrase the statement.

In conclusion, the problems students had when they were expressing themselves were mostly related with the big influence the first language has in second language acquisition which did not allow them to successfully communicate.

3.5 Is the content presented by the teacher suitable for future use in real life situations?

In most of the classes observed, the content could be useful for the future since the vocabulary was taken in most cases from the textbook; the textbook contains communicative situations and functions that parallel events that may occur

in real life. Teachers were presenting real-life language and topics that students will definitely need to express something in the future.

However, in 4 out of 15 classrooms, the content was not all the time suitable for future use, for example there was some vocabulary too technical or difficult to be applied by learners and in other cases, learners used the vocabulary but it did not fit the situation, they did not know the appropriacy of some words. Some courses were following the textbook goals regarding vocabulary and grammar too tightly, neglecting communicative goals.

3.6 Does the teacher develop reading comprehension skills?

No	Yes
10	5
66.66%	33.33%

During the classes observed, it was seen that teachers tended to work on readings from the book. Nonetheless, it was observed that most teachers did not include in their reading activities strategies such as skimming, scanning or summarizing, and they did not train learners to make use of these strategies, which might help learners read more effectively.

Only 5 classes out of 15 worked on reading comprehension, for this purpose they applied different strategies to deal with reading comprehension skills.

The most common strategies teachers used were answering comprehension questions orally or in a written way, or filling gaps and silent reading for everybody.

It was clearly seen that teachers were not presenting reading strategies to their students so that they could understand in a better way a reading and/or extract the most useful information, in order for them to perform better in standardized exams where reading is a very important aspect that always causes the biggest difficulties.

3.6 Does the teacher present common strategies to deal with the student's Interlingua?

When teachers were observed, it was seen that students presented a lot of difficulties when dealing with the foreign language, however when focusing on teachers' attitude, they almost never taught students strategies that could help them when they do not know a word or when they do not know how to say something in English. What students do is just to ask or say what they ignore in Spanish.

3.7 Which strategies does s/he do it?

Translation	Guessing	Repetition	None	Other: mimic
7	3	2	2	1
46.66%	20%	13.33%	13.33%	6.66%

Teachers used translation most of the time with their students when they could not express something in English; teachers almost never paraphrased or taught students other strategies to express themselves in the target language in spite of the lack of knowledge that they could have especially with vocabulary and pronunciation.

4. Assesment and/or testing

4.1 Are there any assessment practices present during the class?
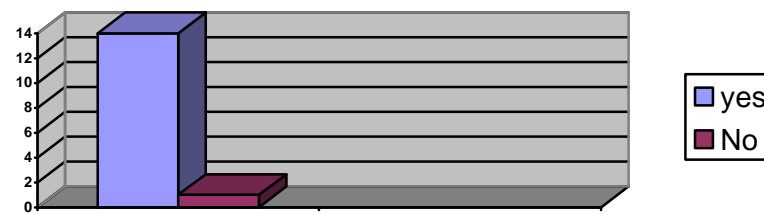
Although the ways to assess can vary and may be difficult to identify, it was seen that in most of the classes there was a time devoted to informally assess the students learning, through the course book's exercises that were checked or through students' participation. So it can be said that assessment was permanent in the classes observed

and that the main instrument for assessing learners were the activities and exercises contained in the textbook.

4.2 What does teacher do to assess students' progress and when does s/he do it?

Teachers, as explained above, applied many kinds of activities to informally assess their students; they made their students work on exercises or practice the topic while teachers analyzed and checked their answers and provided the right answers.

Working on a vocabulary or grammar worksheet or sometimes by developing the textbook's exercises were frequent assessment activities that most of the teachers applied in their classes to check understanding and students' progress.

4.3 After the assessment activity does the teacher give feedback to their students about their target language performance?

According to what was perceived in the classes, teachers sometimes gave feedback to their students. The most common ways were: Peer feedback or direct feedback.

Most of the times feedback was provided at the moment students gave the answers, teacher's observations almost scared them, but this helped them to realize what was wrong immediately. When working on a demanding task teachers went

around providing help where needed and finally correcting students' mistakes, providing the right answer.

In order to help students in spelling, some teachers wrote on the board the wrong answer so students realized there was a mistake and they could solve it by themselves. This type of indirect feedback seemed to be effective for making learners realize their mistakes, but unfortunately, this only happened in 3 classes.

Interviews analysis

A final instrument to collect information on teachers' practices within the communicative frame was an interview conducted with some teachers who kindly accepted to participate.

Teachers interviewed were chosen according to the level they had (two teachers of the same level) and the ages (each teacher with a different age range)

1. What is your definition of competence?

The teachers interviewed were not completely sure about the definition of competence, but they defined it as the knowledge, the inner ability to do something, and the level that students have when they are learning or acquiring a language. One teacher assumed not having a clear concept of what competence means.

2.   Do you have easy access to get information about competences?

Most teachers agreed on the idea that there is not a lot of resources where they can find easy access to get information about competences, but they all agreed on the idea that Internet is an excellent tool to keep updated about this topic, but they hardly ever use it.

3.   Describe your strategy for teaching production skills as speaking and reading.

According to teachers' answers it can be seen that they are implementing speaking instruction in their classes. The most used strategy among teachers according to their answers is discussion, carried out using different techniques and materials but allowing them to speak in freely so that students can express their ideas, agreement or disagreement without restrictions and giving reasons for their answers.

According to what teachers said, it was clear that they have a hard time making their students speak but they always try to find out the way to get their attention by using different materials and techniques, for example presenting videos or introducing interesting and current topics, taking into account their likes and dislikes and the things they are interested in.

In order to teach reading most of the teacher stated that they give learners different materials, from internet or

authentic materials and the technique they use to check comprehension is questions and written assignments.

4.   What competence do teachers teach and assess in the Language Center?

The interviewed teachers had some doubts about this question; they considered that competence was the same as the four skills. Four (4) teachers were completely aware of the communicative approach to be worked in the courses at the Language Center. However, most of them agree on the idea that, in spite of working with that approach, teachers are focused on grammatical competence.

5.   How do you develop Grammar competence in your students?

Generally, teachers try to avoid grammar explanation per se. They chose to give examples and present the grammatical item in a contextualized way so students get the meaning by themselves. However they admitted that working in that way is not an easy task, they all have problems dealing with grammar, because they sometimes end up telling them what the grammar point to be taught is.

6.   How do you assess the competence taught in the courses at the Language Center?

All the teachers had problems trying to answer adequately. However, they concluded stating that they bring material so students can talk and check their understanding.

They also stated that they use a variety of techniques to assess the competence taught, but the most common were written and oral exams giving primacy to formal type of assessment.

7.   Do you think it's important to assess student's Communicative Competence? If so why?

Everybody agreed with the answer stating the importance of the Communicative Competence in an EFL setting. They highlighted the supremacy of helping students to interact and communicate with others so students feel free to speak in the foreign language. They also stated that assessing Communicative Competence allows them to realize if students are acquiring or not the language, and if they use it effectively.

8.   How do you assess pragmatic competence inside the classroom?

Most of the teachers did not know what pragmatic competence involved. So they mentioned approaches like TPR, and strategies like role-plays. Four (4) of the teachers interviewed were aware that it concerns culture. They emphasized that they explain students how to use certain language in a different context, the appropriacy of certain words or expressions and slang, they make a difference between our culture and the foreign culture so that they

can realize how language works, depending the context and
environment.

9.   Should teachers be trained by the government in the
global field of performing something in context?

All the teachers interviewed think that government
should help teachers because education is the main concern
in Colombia and there is a lack of information that hinders
the teaching process. According to the teachers, government
must prepare teachers about what are its expectations in
the new projects it is carrying in the field of language.
However six (6) teachers agreed on the fact that it is an
individual responsibility to find out and know the new
policies and approaches and that is their responsibility to
be updated about these and other topics that can contribute
to enhancing the teaching and learning conditions.

10.   According to you, which type of competence is the
most important in Foreign Language Teaching?

In this question a misunderstanding of types of
competences with skills was very common; most of them
thought that all the skills are important when learning a
language only three teachers mentioned the Communicative
Competence arguing that it is the most important because
the goal of the course is to teach students how to express
their ideas so they can be understood by the others.
Another problem with teachers dealing with the term

Communicative Competence is that they consider they are giving primacy to communication when they are developing speaking and listening, not taking into account the written communication which is also important when someone is acquiring Communicative Competence.

11. ¿Do you know any research project addressed to improve the process of evaluation by competences?

Nobody knows any piece of research addressing this topic, which confirms the idea that teachers in our setting lack resources where they can find relevant information for keeping updated. One (1) teacher affirmed she read an article related to competences from the magazine "How", a local magazine that publishes articles done by the teachers at the University. Another teacher said that she has heard something in the new research projects, but she has not read them.

Comparison: differences and similarities

After finishing the report of the surveys, the observations, and the interviews used to collect relevant information for this study, it is necessary to state the differences and similarities found among the data collected and come up with some conclusions that represent the real situation teachers face each day while teaching English in a foreign setting.

Use of English in class

When teachers were asked if they promote the use of English in class, a 71.8% of the survey takers said that they always promote it in their classes because according to them that is what they have to do and that is the main goal in teaching a foreign language, since English Class is the only opportunity to be exposed to the language and the Language Center follows a communicative approach.

However during the observations, the use of English was limited; teachers did not always speak in L2, for example, in 2 classrooms the class was carried out mostly in Spanish, 3 teachers worked half of the time in Spanish and the other half in English, translating almost all the time everything they said to the mother tongue.

Only two teachers and their students were using English all the time, these teachers never used Spanish to explain a new word or a new topic, students answered and talked to the teacher in the L2, which helped them to understand and produce language. If a communicative approach is encouraged in the Language Center, this should have been the commonality, not the exception.

On the other hand, students are not using the target language, they just use it when they have to practice the topic, because teacher asked them something, but they never

speak in English with their classmates or interact with the teacher

Skills developed through the class

According to teachers, they mainly develop oral skill such as speaking and listening. Grammar did not have a good score although it was not neglected.

During the classes it was observed that grammar is the main aspect to be developed in classes of the Language Center: 6 classes out of 10 were teaching and practicing a specific grammar point. In 7 classes the content was related to grammar, so students were practicing and doing exercises but everything related to that aspect. Speaking was also highly promoted but giving an emphasis on practice orally the grammatical items taught.

Grammar presentation

In the surveys, a 40.6% of the teachers stated that they sometimes work and present grammar points, almost a 18.7 admitted to be working on grammar all the time and none of the teachers neglect it at all, so in general, teachers stated that grammar is a very important aspect in language learning, this was proved in the observations because most of the teachers were working on grammatical aspects (more than a half). Inside the classes, it was seen that many of the techniques that teachers explained in the surveys were practiced and developed in order for students to realize by

themselves the rules and the meaning of the grammar that is taught, but there are teachers that are giving students the explanation and the rules although in the surveys most of the teachers (56.2%) stated that formulation of rules is important when acquiring the Communicative Competence.

The techniques used by teachers to explain grammar seemed to be effective to develop the grammatical competence; students understand the grammar and how to use it.

Starting the language class

In general teachers start their classes by asking open ended questions, making students talk about a topic or retell something about their lives. According to the teachers, they highly use this technique to interact with their students and get they used to use the target language. Also when they were observed, most of them asked their students free questions so that they could express themselves and give opinions while practicing the language.

Activities used to practice

Teachers give relevance to practice the foreign language; in most of their classes they make students put the grammar points into practice, mostly through written or oral exercises. Teachers also agree on this aspect that the most used way to make students practice is by providing them drills or written exercises where they could analyze the grammar taught.

However most of them argue that exercises are not the most successful activity to develop the Communicative Competence. According to them the most successful activities are those that require students' oral production, such as discussions and oral presentations, but these activities are not commonly used during classes.

Teachers' answers demonstrate that exercises are not effective enough to promote Communicative Competence and that was clearly seen where English was practiced by doing some exercises, students had a lot of difficulties and problems dealing with grammar, they did not produce a big amount of language and they hardly ever communicate something successfully in the classroom. It can be added that although teachers focused on trying to go over the exercises and make students complete them, the attitude learners had was not adequate and they did not seem interested in carrying out the tasks.

The role of translation in language learning

59.3% of the teachers agreed on the idea that teaching translation is not very important but it cannot be avoided, translation can be useful to explain some words that are difficult to explain in L2 and also when that is time consuming. In first levels, translation is very important because students can have the clear meaning of the new

vocabulary. However in 2 classrooms translation was used as a main activity to practice the language.

Developing strategic competence

    According to teachers, teaching students strategies to deal with Interlingua is really important; the strategy they mostly teach them is paraphrasing. In the observations, however it was seen that teachers almost never teach them and force them to use a different way to give an idea when they did not know the grammar and how they could say an unknown word in a different way.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

   After analyzing the data collected the following conclusions can be drawn:

The information collected helped to understand the limitations and potentialities teachers face when teaching English as a foreign language in a setting such as Pasto and it can be said that if Communicative Competence cannot be effectively developed in a communicative course with 8 hours a week, with a textbook and with all the tools available at the Language Center (VCRs, tape recorders, TV sets) then the goal of developing Communicative Competence in high-schools which have lots of limitations is almost impossible to achieve.

   Most of the teachers affirmed to always use the target language inside their classes and they recognize the importance of exposing learners to the foreign language, but according to what it was observed a few percentage of English classes were carried out totally in English, teachers speak in Spanish almost all the time almost in all levels, or sometimes they just translate them everything into their mother tongue. This situation should be changed if the courses at the Language Center want to really offer the development of Communicative Competence within a communicative approach. The way some teachers carry out their

classes should be shared with the others since these few teachers really helped learners develop skills in the foreign language and are actually following the philosophy of a Language Center.

When teachers were asked if they promoted the use of English in class, all of them said they promoted it, but sometimes the teacher is the only one who speaks in the foreign language, as students are not used to it; they speak in Spanish during the whole period of the class, learners almost never use the target language, they even do not use it to request information or talk to their classmates, students were not using the classroom language, so the use of English in most classes was very scarce, contradicting the principles of a communicative classroom where learners are negotiating meaning constantly and the teacher is a guide for them to improve their performance.

Even when teachers know and stated that grammar is not very important and that it has to be taught in an inductive way, they do not avoid grammar explanations, it is hard for them not to present the topic by explaining grammatical aspects, most of them explain the grammar point in Spanish, providing the rules and formulae, while only a few teachers try to present grammar in context, something that is not always successful, especially when students ask for rules due to their lack of knowledge and comprehension. So at the end

teachers end up writing on the board the grammar in an isolated way, giving rules and explaining the grammar in an explicit way, a fact that is not part of a communicative approach and which does not contribute to the development of Communicative Competence. Grammar should not be taught explicitly to learners since their purposes are not academic but communicative. Especially when dealing with children and teenagers, grammar should not be made explicit, but included in meaningful pieces of discourse from where learners can learn the use.

During surveys and interviews, teachers stated that they try to encourage oral production, but it was not really a general fact, few of them introduce a topic by asking open-ended questions, but others decided just to follow the activities, readings and exercises from the textbook to the foot, following completely each of the exercises present on it without taking into account the audience they are working with or the way learners reacted when the teacher announced an activity, which made students get interested in the topic since the very beginning of the class.

When doing interviews and surveys, teachers asserted that translation is not important in teaching a foreign language, it is only important when something is extremely difficult to explain in the L2 and to get the meaning in a better way, especially in elementary levels. However what it

was observed was that most teachers gave the translation of a word directly without giving learners the opportunity to understand the meaning in the target language, sometimes, teachers asked students to translate whole sentences or they just gave the corresponding translation in Spanish, which made students get confused and worry about having the exact translation for everything all the time. When some teachers did not give them the translation, students turned to their classmates to get the meaning of the word in Spanish.

When asking teachers which strategies they teach to their students to cope with the imperfect knowledge they could have, they chose many strategies like paraphrasing (the most common answer), repetition, guessing and translation (with the lower score), but according to what it was checked they do not use these strategies very often, at least during the classes observed; they do not teach or tell their students how they can react when they do not know a word or they are not sure about what they want to express in the foreign language. When Students have one of these problems they just say the things they want to say in Spanish, without making any effort to express them in English.

The results gotten form the surveys and observations show that teachers in the Language Center prefer starting classes asking open-ended questions. As a result students do not feel pressure to speak in the foreign language, but they

felt reluctant to produce language, because they only speak when the activity is graded.

The biggest part of the population observed gave a limited time to practice and solve a certain task. Oral skill was the main focus of the classes observed. Nonetheless it can be said that practice did not allow students to produce language effectively, sometimes because of their uninterested attitude towards the activity or because the exercise was neither appealing, nor interesting since the learners had been doing exercises with the same lay out all through the book, apparently, learners felt that the activities were too predictable and uninteresting.

The survey takers asserted that exercises and oral presentation are the most used activities to practice inside the classroom, however during the observations, most teachers used only the book applying all the exercises and readings contained in it.

As it was found in the surveys, teachers expressed that speaking and listening are the most important skills to consider when teaching a language; nevertheless, in actual classroom practice, teachers' classes were focused on grammar which is not the goal of carrying out classes in communicative courses. Teachers should reflect on the goal of people who attend communicative courses and realize that they are not interested in grammar since they will not become

English teachers, learners only need English for functional purposes and that should be the focus of the teaching and learning process at the Language Center.

Even when teachers consider important to make students aware of how to link sentences coherently their ideas, it was seen that teachers almost never present them techniques to acquire this competence.

According to survey takers' answers, it's a need to present cultural appropriacy of the new vocabulary taught, but in none of the classes teachers introduced this important aspect in their classes.

Based on the answers gotten form the surveys, interviews and observations, teachers use formal assessment in order to check students understanding, disregarding other important forms such as portfolios, diaries or any other form of authentic assessment.

After finishing this research, it could be realized the need of Communicative technique instruction, so that teachers can have resources that help them in any time.

Recommendations

After having done this research project, it can be concluded that this research may constitute the basis for future researches about Communicative Competence. Additionally, the following recommendations are suggested, not only for teachers at the Language Center of the

University of Nariño (where this research took place) but also for all training and professional language teachers who wants to develop their students' Communicative Competence.

As the courses at the Language Center are communicative, teachers must consider useful material, especially authentic material to develop and improve all the skills in their students.

Most of the classes observed placed great emphasis on grammar. It's assumed that teaching grammar to English learners as a foreign language is inescapable rather than indispensable; however, teachers must ensure that learners are giving realistic presentations of language in use. That is, no grammar rules, they are isolated and non meaningful, but grammar in context in order for students to get a better understanding and consequently a worthwhile knowledge.

In order to get students involved in language learning, it was found that one of the most effective ways to develop communicative ability with no loss of grammatical accuracy is by replacing structure language for language focused on meaning that is notions and functions.

The textbook is one useful tool, teacher must use it and follow it as a guide, but it is not the only one. Textbooks' exercises must be a complement of activities carried out in the classroom that take into account the context in which students are learning. Teachers' concern must be to apply

meaningful and real life tasks, and to bring challenging and authentic material that could keep students' interest. Although it is a fact that teachers do not have enough time or sometimes the resources to create or acquire materials such as videos, tapes and stories, the University does offer a computers' room where teachers can download material from the Internet and save it to a floppy disk for further use. This material is authentic, updated and could trigger the interest of learners who seemed bored of using exclusively the book through all the class.

When learning and teaching a foreign language, culture has to be taken into consideration. It is necessary that teachers explain what is appropriate incongruous and what might cause offence to others when facing real-life situations.

Pondering the importance of the Communicative Competence in communicative courses like the offered by the Language Center, it is important to consider the subcomponents of this competence, such as the grammatical, discourse, strategic and sociolinguistic competence, which must be worked together without excluding any of them.

Working on a communicative course does not mean that the class is focused on the development of oral skills such as speaking or listening. It is important to consider that all skills aimed to interaction and that oral language is not the

only form of communication. The written language is actually taking an important status in human communication and therefore, teachers must develop written skills in their students and prepare them for future real situations where they are going to face experiences where they must use their writing or reading abilities, such as standardized exams and or any other academic tasks.

A class developing Communicative Competence must place a great importance on English use and interaction. Teachers should always use the L2 to provide a great input and get students familiarized to it, besides of forcing them to speak and use the L2 to request, ask and interact with the teacher and peers.

The target language must be mostly practiced by students in the classroom, giving primacy to their own experiences or what they could express using their English not just isolated, non meaningful drills and exercises.

Teachers have a big range of possibilities to assess their students, different from the traditional ones. They could make teachers realize about students' level in a holistic way and not just testing isolated discrete points because they allow students interact freely, showing their abilities while they are tested about their performance in the L2.

Proposal

After having carried out a research in the Language Center to know how teachers work and assess Communicative Competence, 15 classes were observed, 32 teachers were the survey-takers, and 8 teachers were interviewed in a period of a month. Time enough to discover and become aware of the teachers' weaknesses and strengths when teaching a foreign language and developing this competence.

According to the policies of the Language Center at the University of Nariño, English courses are communicative, that is, they are addressed to foster the Communicative Competence; however, regarding the results gotten from this research it can be said that teachers seem not to have a clear understanding of what the Language Center is pursuing.

As a result, this proposal will provide a horizon-broadening variety of projects, enlightenments, techniques, materials and activities related to teacher English education that can make language teaching communicative in the broadest, most meaningful sense.

For this purpose a clear outline of how to work and interpret Communicative Competence and all its subcomponents are going to be presented as well as some parameters to follow inside the classroom to make this important competence an attainable goal.

The ideas, techniques and materials suggested in this proposal will be of interest to all teachers who wish to extend their professional experience as well as introduce Communicative Competence, and in particular to those who feel the need for input to stimulate and motivate their students in their work.

The techniques and tasks designed in this proposal could be used by teachers working at the Language Center to develop Communicative Competence, although they are also suitable for use by teachers working in a wide range of circumstances, and both for teachers who are and are not native speakers of the language.

However, as expressed by teachers, there is a need to be guided in the field of competences so if it is required the researchers are willing to provide a short conference where all the things suggested in this proposal will be widely explained.

Communicative Competence refers to the ability to interact in the foreign language, it has four components that must be linked and worked together, and they cannot be developed or measured in isolation. Rather, when an increase occurs in one area, that component interacts with other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall Communicative Competence (Savignon, S. 2002)

What grammatical Competence is Not

Grammatical competence does not refer to the mastery of isolated grammar rules; it intends not to forsake grammar instruction, rather, the replacement of rules with self-expression focused on meaning without disregarding the importance of it. To attain this, it is required to present grammar in context so students can realize by themselves the meaning behind the form.

Discourse competence refers to the connection of a series of sentences or utterances to form a meaningful whole, that is to get the main idea of a text (written or oral) and link coherently sentences into a paragraph or a conversation.

In order to cope with this, teachers, first of all, should present authentic materials as a pattern to analyze and imitate, then they must introduce certain techniques such as guessing meaning from context, getting the gist, paraphrasing, and inferring connections found in a text.

Working on Strategic competence involves teaching students what they can do when they cannot think of a word; the ways of keeping opened the channels of communication while they are wondering; how they can let their interlocutor know they do not understand a word or that s/he is speaking too fast; how they can be able to paraphrase when the message was not understood.

These strategies could include: paraphrasing, repetition, avoidance, hesitation, and guessing.

On the other hand, Sociolinguistic competence arises. It requires an understanding of the social context where language is used that is the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction.

When talking in a foreign language trying to express personal ideas students have to consider what to say in a situation, how to say it, and when to remain silent.

On the other hand, developing Communicative Competence in a foreign language implies working on the 4 skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing which have to be worked conjointly without forgetting that each one is the complement of each other.

In real life as in the classroom, most tasks involve more than one skill. There are occasions, certainly, when one is simply listening, speaking, reading or writing to the exclusion of the other skills for instance: when watching a soup opera on television, reading a novel, giving a lecture, or writing a letter to a friend. But, in most of the cases a number of skills are interconnected into one complex activity. (Nunan, D. 1989)

Teachers also need to know what type of audience they are going to work with, their academic needs, materials to apply, techniques to work on and students' learning styles.

Through out the development of the overall Communicative Competences, it is a primacy to understand the role of the use of English inside the classroom. Teachers need to know that they always have to speak in English, this helps students to get used to the foreign language and it forces them to practice and use their knowledge. Translating everything into their mother tongue does not allow them to start thinking in English. A great input is provided when teachers explain the directions of how to perform a task and unknown words giving clues.

Additionally, it is important for teachers to encourage learners to talk and interact with their teachers and peers in the L2, so they can communicate and share their own thoughts and personal ideas.

The classes should start with activities that involve learners in the target language such as: open-ended questions about personal information trying to elicit as much language as possible; brainstorming a certain topic so students bring to their minds vocabulary and expressions they have learnt; small talks, short readings, dialogues and/or listening activities.

A class developing Communicative Competence gives primacy to students' production rather than teachers talk. So, time devoted to teachers' speech has to be limited to giving directions, asking questions, giving feedback,

explanations, and answering students' questions. While students' free production and their use of the L2, must be widely fostered.

One of the things to consider in communicative classrooms is time devoted to practice what has been taught. However, most of the teachers spend their time just explaining grammar and working on written exercises and drills. What teachers may have to consider is that classes' practice must be focused on producing meaningful language where students can express themselves.

At this point, giving feedback to students becomes the central role in language acquisition, but providing direct feedback is not the way out, because students can feel unwilling and afraid of sharing their thoughts. In contrast teachers should give students the opportunity to realize the mistakes by themselves and/or correct their peers.

Similarly, a part of the class must be aimed to assess students' knowledge. Teachers can have a wide range of possibilities to check learners' understanding different from the common and overused testing techniques like quizzes and written and/or oral exams which belong to formal assessment. The assessment of Communicative Competence differs from the traditional discrete point tests that are focused on one grammatical item. Tests of Communicative Competence integrate the components of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic

competence, discourse competence and strategic competence, to reflect the characteristics of Communicative Competence.

As stated by Savignon, tests of Communicative Competence have the following features, which should be considered by teachers in communicative courses, not just at the Language Center, but also at the University of Nariño:

They assess the dynamic negotiation of meaning between two or more persons or between one person and an oral or written text.

They include measures of both written and spoken language as well as nonverbal features of communication.

They are context specific.

Finally tests of Communicative Competence in classroom settings should be ongoing (i.e., not confined to the end-of-semester or end-of-year examination period) so as reflect the evolving nature of a learner's communicative ability.

Activities where students can demonstrate what they can do and perform in the target language are innovative ways that belong to new trends of Alternative and Authentic Assessment. Current tendencies aim to different activities like portfolio assessment, the collection and evaluation of learners' poems, reports, stories, videotapes and similar projects in an effort to represent and encourage learner achievement as well as oral presentations, easy writing essays and diaries.

Finally, it has summarized the most important facts to consider when being exposed to a foreign language. Just as important, it has sought to present collective suggestions to the insight of those many, many classrooms learners and teachers who have successful in making communication an integral part of their language programs.

It is important to remark that those who dare to speak in another language should be applauded and supported in their effort for acquiring an L2.

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Instrument design

Observation

Level: _____

Date: _____

Teacher: _____

Time: _____

Age of the students: _____

Number of the students: _____

Class presentation

1.   The content the teacher presents is mainly related to

☐ Grammar   ☐   Vocabulary

☐ Cultural information   ☐ Notions

☐ Functions   ☐   Real life situations

☐ Other: _____

1.2 How does the teacher introduce the topic of

the class?

☐   Trough a game   ☐ Dialogue

☐ Asking open questions   ☐   Doing small talk

☐ With short readings   ☐ Grammar explanation

☐   Other :_____

1.2 According to the teacher method, how good is his/her

performance?

_____

_____

_____

1.3 What kinds of materials does the teacher use?

☐ Worksheet   ☐ Videos   ☐ Tape recorder

☐ Readings   ☐ Books   ☐ Wall chart

☐ Pictures   ☐ Magazines   ☐ Flashcards

☐ Puppets

1.3.1 How does the teacher use them?

_____

_____

_____

1.3.2 Are the materials successful in terms of eliciting abundant and accurate English Production?

_____

_____

_____

1.4   Is a part of the class devoted to oral and/or written practice in the L2?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Time: _____

1.5.1 Which activities are developed inside the classroom to practice the foreign language?

☐ Role plays   ☐ Exercises   ☐ Readings

☐ Discussions   ☐ Drills   ☐ Oral presentations

☐ Translation   ☐ Writing   ☐ None

☐ Games   ☐ Other: _____

1.5.2   What is the students' attitude towards the
activity?_____

_____

1.5.3   Is the practice effective in terms of the amount
and quality of the language produced?

_____

_____

---

2. Interaction.

2. 1   The class is carried out :

☐   Totally in English   ☐   Mostly in English

☐   Mostly in Spanish   ☐   Totally in Spanish.

☐ Half of the time in English and half in Spanish

2.2   Teacher interacts in the foreign language with:

☐   The whole class   ☐ A group of students

☐   One student   ☐ Nobody

2.3   Students use the target language to:

☐   Ask the teacher   ☐   Request information

☐ Practice the topic being taught   ☐   Give examples

☐   Almost always   ☐   Talk to the teacher

☐   Talk to their classmate   ☐   Give information

☐   Never.   ☐   Other: _____

2.4   The class activities are developed in :

☐ Group work   ☐ Individual Work

☐   Whole class   ☐ Pair Work

3. Working on competences

3.1 Is the development of the Communicative Competence evident along the classes?

☐ Yes   ☐   No

3.2 Which skills and components are mainly developed in class?

☐ Reading   ☐ Writing

☐ Listening   ☐ Speaking

☐ Pronunciation   ☐ Grammar

☐ All of them   ☐   None

3.3. If grammar is introduced, how is grammar presented?

☐ Through rules ☐ In an explicit way ☐ In an implicit way

3.4 Does that strategy seem to contribute to develop grammatical competence?

☐ Yes   ☐   No

3.5 When students are speaking or writing, they produce or attempt to produce a fluent and coherent discourse:

☐ Always   ☐   Almost all the time   ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely   ☐ Never

3.5.1 Which are the weaknesses students present when producing language?

_____

_____ _____

_____

3.6 Does the teacher presents new vocabulary taking into account the cultural appropriacy of some items (slang, foul language)?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

3.7 Is the content presented by the teacher suitable for future use in real life situations?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

3.8 Does the teacher develop reading comprehension skills?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If so, which strategies does s/he use?

_____

_____

_____

3.9 Does the teacher present common strategies to deal with the student's interlanguage?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

3.9.1 Which strategies does s/he teach?

☐ Translation   ☐ Paraphrasing   ☐ Guessing

☐ Repetition   ☐ None   ☐ Others: _____

4. Assessment and/or Testing

4.1   Are there any assessment practices present during the class?

☐ Yes   ☐   No

4.2   What does teacher do to assess students' progress and when does s/he do it?

_____

_____

_____

4.3   After the assessment activity does the teacher give feedback to their students about their target language performance?

☐ Yes   ☐   No

How?

_____

_____

_____

Interview.

1. What is your definition of competence?

2. Do you have easy access to get information about competences?

3. Describe your strategy for teaching production skills as speaking and reading.

4. What competence do teachers teach and assess in the Language Center?

5. How do you develop Grammar competence in your students?

6. How do you assess the competence taught in the courses at the Language Center?

7. Do you think it's important to assess student's Communicative Competence? If so why?

8. How do you assess pragmatic competence inside the classroom?

9. Should teachers be trained by the government in the global field of performing something in context?

10.   According to you, which type of competence is the most important in Foreign Language Teaching?

11.   ¿Do you know any research project addressed to improve the process of evaluation by competences?

Survey

Dear teacher. The purpose of this survey is to respond to a practical work of a research we are carrying out to know the teacher's management of assessment through competences in order to analyze the best way to handle this situation in our environment. Your contribution will be important for us, it is anonym and volunteer. You can choose more than one option. Thanks.

Questionnaire

1. Do you promote the use of English in class?

☐ Always   ☐ Almost all the time   ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely   ☐ Never

If so why?_____

_____

_____

2. Do you teach grammatical aspects of the language to develop the language competence?

☐ Always   ☐ Almost all the time   ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely   ☐ Never

If so, How do you introduce the grammatical aspects?

_____

_____

_____

3.   Do you consider that working on competences implies the mastery and formulation of grammar rules?

☐   Yes   ☐   No

Why? _____

_____

_____

How do you introduce the class – topic?

☐ Trough a game ☐ dialogue   ☐ asking free questions

☐ Small talk   ☐ short readings ☐ grammar explanation

Other: _____

4.   What activities do you develop inside the classroom to practice the foreign language?

☐ Role plays   ☐ Exercises   ☐ Readings   ☐ Games

☐ Discussions   ☐ Drills   ☐ Oral presentations

☐Translation   ☐ Writing   ☐ None   ☐ Other:

_____

5.1   According to your experience which of those activities is the most successful? Why?

_____

_____

_____

5.   What do you think is the role of teaching translation in language learning?

☐   Very important   ☐ Important   ☐ regular

☐   Not important   ☐ Useless

6.1 What does teaching translation imply?_____

_____

_____

6. Which skills do you mainly promote in your class?
Assign a value to each following item being 5 the most
important and 1 less important.

☐ Listening   ☐ Speaking   ☐ Reading

☐ Writing   ☐ Grammar   ☐ Pronunciation

☐ Vocabulary   ☐ All of them   ☐ None

7. Do you develop reading comprehension skills?

☐ Always   ☐ Almost all the time   ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely   ☐ Never

How? _____

_____

_____

8. Do you devote some time to teach how sentences must
be coherently linked?

☐ Always   ☐ Almost all the time   ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely   ☐ Never

9.1 In your opinion is this important to teach ?

☐ Yes   ☐   No

Why? _____

_____

_____

9. What type of strategies do you teach to your students to compensate the lack of knowledge in the foreign language?

☐   Translation   ☐ Paraphrasing   ☐ Guessing

☐   Repetition   ☐ None   ☐ Others: _____

10. Do you teach vocabulary taking into account the cultural appropriacy of some items (slang, foul language)?

☐ Always   ☐ Almost all the time   ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely   ☐ Never

11. What do you use mainly to assess the students' learning?

☐ Oral tests   ☐ Written tests   ☐ Readings

☐ Writing assignments ☐ Portfolio   ☐ Presentations

☐ Worksheets   ☐ Multiple choice tests

12.1 What type of questions do you use to assess your students?

☐ Open ended questions   ☐   Multiple choice

☐   Filling the gaps   ☐ Others: _____

12.2 What of the following aspects do you consider measurable in the tests you apply to your students:

☐   Translation   ☐   formulation of rules ☐ Fluency

☐ Grammar aspect   ☐ Foreign language production

☐   Others: _____

13. What is, in your opinion, the role of culture when teaching a foreign language?

_____

_____

_____