UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR

SCHOOL OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

"THE TEACHING TECHNIQUES USED BY ENGLISH TEACHERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR AND DON BOSCO UNIVERSITY AND THEIR EFFECT ON REACHING THE EXPECTED ORAL PROFICIENCY LEVEL ON SECOND YEAR STUDENTS."

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INTRODUCTION

Through this investigation report the reader will be able to know the techniques used by teachers in the second year courses from Licenciatura en idioma Ingles Options enseñanza from both University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University. Besides the techniques used by teachers, this report shows according to well recognized authors like Alice Omaggio and Douglas Brown the different technique required to be used in order to reach oral proficiency in students. The student's current state regarding oral proficiency level is shown along with the reason of that state.

Summarizing, by the end of reading this report the reader will be able to know what the oral proficiency level of students is in comparison what the expected one by the end of their courses, besides that, what teachers are doing to reach that goal. The reader will be also able to compare those techniques used by teachers with the ones according to authors should be used to reach oral proficiency in students.

OBJECTIVES

General:

- To identify the teaching techniques used by teachers to reach the expected oral proficiency level in the students from University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University.

Specific:

- To find out the actual oral proficiency level achieved by students from second year of the Licenciatura en idioma Ingles Opcion enseñanza at the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University.

- To determine how the current teaching techniques affect the oral proficiency acquisition process.

SIGNIFICANCE:

This investigation finds its meaning in the necessity of knowing what the actual current oral proficiency level is of students by the end of their second year English courses in comparison to the level that the students are required to meet under administrative guidelines. Through this investigation teachers and administrative personnel will be able to clearly see the reality of the student's oral proficiency levels in contrast with the ideal standards of oral proficiency levels imposed by the English program. They will also be shown the importance of what is required of them in order to obtain higher oral proficiency levels from their students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brown (1993) states that techniques are defined as "the specific activities manifested in the classroom…" (p.48). Brown (1993) informs the reader that before one can make a decision on what kinds of teaching techniques to be used in the classroom, one must identify two factors. First, a grounded knowledge of the overall approach of language learning, an extensive comprehension on how learners learn and how teachers facilitate the learning process must be achieved. Second, one must know who learners are, how proficient they are and what their goals in learning are. Brown (1993) defines two major groups of techniques used by teachers in the classroom: controlled techniques and free student-centred techniques. He explains that these techniques fall onto a continuum that one end represents high manipulation and the other end represents high communication/interaction.

The extreme of the manipulated side consists of total teacher control with predicted student responses such as mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills. The other extreme of communication/interaction consists largely of student control and unpredicted responses. Examples of this would be story-telling, problem solving, information exchanges, etc.

Students at the beginner levels should use more teacher-centred techniques. This is due to their limited ability to initiated questions and responses. However, it is important to always foster communicative tasks and involve lower level classes in interactive activities. Beginning level classes will lean strongly on a teacher controlled environment since students at this level have no ability to control the class period. As proficiency is gained the teacher will focus on using less controlled techniques and put more emphasis on free

student-centred techniques. This topic is also cited in Alice Omaggio's (1993) works, a Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education, she says that "controlled processing can be said to lay down the 'stepping stones' for automatic processing as the learner moves to more and more difficult levels." (p.55)

Techniques alone, however, are not enough to make a class successful. Most techniques involve the use of supporting materials to enhance the classroom experience. Although conversations, dialogues, role plays and black board work are necessary to teaching a new language, it is also vital to accompany these techniques with supporting materials such as pictures, maps, charts, audio visuals and realia. "The use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint the students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials alone." (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.82) Teaching techniques should always be developed within an authentic material environment to enable students to better develop their performance in real language situations.

Error correction techniques are another relevant topic related to creating a high oral proficiency level and maintaining a positive affective climate in your classroom. Choosing error correction strategies which do not put the student in an embarrassing or singled-out position goes a long way in making the student feel comfortable enough to take risks in your language classroom.

English teachers need to be very careful when correcting students because this practice raises the affective filter. The concern arises that error correction can provoke a student's anxiety about what classmates might think about the student's performance.

It is highly suggested that error correction should not be used in free conversations.

Considering this, it is important to avoid error corrections or grammar instructions when developing communicative activities because this does very little to encourage lasting positive change in the learners' production. The better thing to do to is to give feedback which refers to the process of giving students information so that they can judge if their production or comprehension of the language is correct, from that, correction will come as a result of feedback.

Some error correction strategies state that when a student is attempting to master particular features of a language, direct immediate correction can be beneficial. However, when a student is engaging in free conversation or focused on any activity that is communicative and meaningful in nature, little to no correction is necessary. Also it is important to keep in mind that what works for one student may not work for another, therefore it is necessary to know the students personality characteristics, learning styles and learning preferences.

In order to help students produce more accurate speech one of the most important strategies is to constantly provide appropriate feedback, direct or indirect, immediate or delayed depending on the activity, its purpose and the individuality of the student.

METHODOLOGY

Several steps were taken in order to carry out the investigation. First, it was necessary to get the approval of the heads of the foreign language departments from both of the Universities, University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University. This was obtained by sending a letter to those in charged of both departments. After getting the approval it was necessary to define the universe and the sample for the data collecting process. The second year English course was chosen as the universe. Defining who was going to be interviewed was an important stage in this investigation because presently there are many universities and academies that offer free courses and there was a possibility many of the students of the chosen universe must have been part of any of those outside the university. In order to avoid the sample from becoming contaminated with those biased students who had previously been exposed to courses outside their respective curriculum, a questionnaire was designed and administered to a singular second year English course, Intensive Intermediate English 2 at the later part of the term, in both universities, UES and DBU with the intention of selecting qualified candidates to participate in an Oral Proficient Interview. The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is a structured procedure for the assessment of functional speaking ability. The OPI`s were conducted by Jenny Rose, a fourth year Peace Corps Volunteer, who is OPI and ESL certified.

The determining factor of who would participate in our interviews was dependent on the answers given from our questionnaire that was aimed to segregate students that were or are exposed to the target language from the students who have learned English solely through the English program received through UES or DBU.

This allowed for unbiased sample groups. The Intensive Intermediate English 2 class at UES consisted of 40 students and the Intensive Intermediate English 2 class at DBU consisted of 33 students. After processing the questionnaire, the sample groups chosen indicated 11 students qualified to participate from UES and 9 from UDB. In addition to the OPI's administered, both of the chosen Intensive Intermediate English 2 courses were then observed for five consecutive days with the intention to identify the teaching techniques used in the classroom and then comparing those techniques with Brown's (1993) list of Taxonomy of Language Teaching Techniques (p.142).

By the end of the observations and after analysing them, the interviews were set up. The OPI interviews were made through free conversations that were approximately 10 to 20 minutes long while taping them.

Having the data gathered, the information was organized, revised, and analyzed to get to the findings and conclusions.

ESSAY

Students of the second year at the foreign language departments, in both the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University, do not meet their expected oral proficiency of Intermediate High. This study was based on Oral Proficiency Interviews administered to second year foreign language students on both campuses. According to the syllabus found in the University of El Salvador, second year students should be at a proficiency level of Intermediate High, however, both the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University were found to be at a range between Novice Mid and Intermediate Low with the vast majority being placed in Intermediate Low, which constitutes an average of two levels below the expected proficiency level.

The following dissertation was designed and implemented to understand why the University of El Salvador is not meeting the standards that it requires undergraduates placed in the Foreign Language Department. Information from the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University was gathered through a series of 20 Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) conducted by a certified interviewer to second year foreign language students alongside five classroom assessments from each college. Don Bosco University was elected to participate in the study due to its prestige as one of the top private schools in the country. The intention being that a comparison would be made as to whether the second year foreign language students at Don Bosco University were meeting the necessary oral proficiency level of Intermediate High and through further evaluation discover how their means of teaching differs from that of the University of El Salvador. However, as the

reader will see, neither of these two Universities met their intended oral proficiency level. The purpose of this paper will be to explain why.

In this dissertation the investigators will review and analyze the information obtained through the administered OPI´s and various classroom observations. This dissertation will also discuss several key elements needed to achieve high oral proficiency in the classroom. Theories of language learning will be briefly explored. Key concepts such as motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, in the classroom will be examined including important concepts such as affective factors and the interaction effect and how they all influence oral proficiency. In addition it is essential to understand how classroom techniques, supporting materials, correction of errors and teaching strategies shape a student's ability to achieve the aspired target language. Lastly, a detailed investigation of the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco in regards to their classroom and teaching approach will be evaluated and included throughout this article.

The classroom observations at the University of El Salvador were held within a classroom that consisted of approximately 40 second year students. The classroom observations at Don Bosco University were held within a classroom that consisted of approximately 32 second year students. These sample groups were chosen randomly.

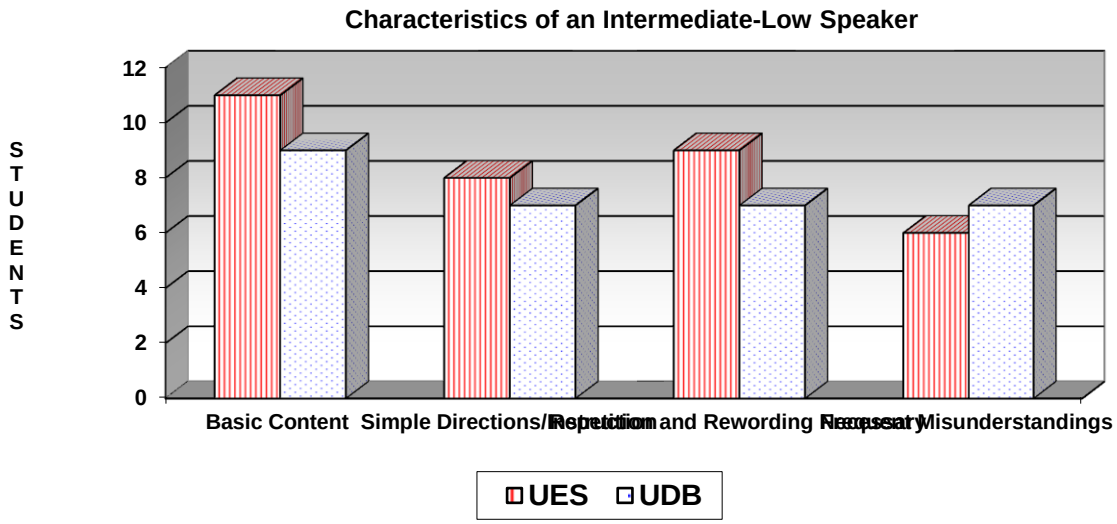
The sample groups were then supplied questionnaires; the objective of these questionnaires was to eliminate students from the above sample groups that had previously been exposed to an extra curricular English course or had visited/lived in an English speaking country.

The final product yielded a sample group of 11 second year students at the University of El Salvador and a sample group of 9 second year students at Don Bosco University. Oral Proficiency Interviews were then administered to these two sample groups. The OPI`s

were conducted by Jenny Rose, a fourth year Peace Corps Volunteer, who is OPI and ESL certified.

The OPI was given to determine the maximum sustained level of English language proficiency for each of the individuals within the two sample groups. During the interview a series of questions were asked as well as being engaged in professional and social conversation with the OPI professional interviewer. Most of the interview was simply talking with the interviewer on a variety of topics. The sole purpose of the OPI was to evaluate each individual's English language proficiency.

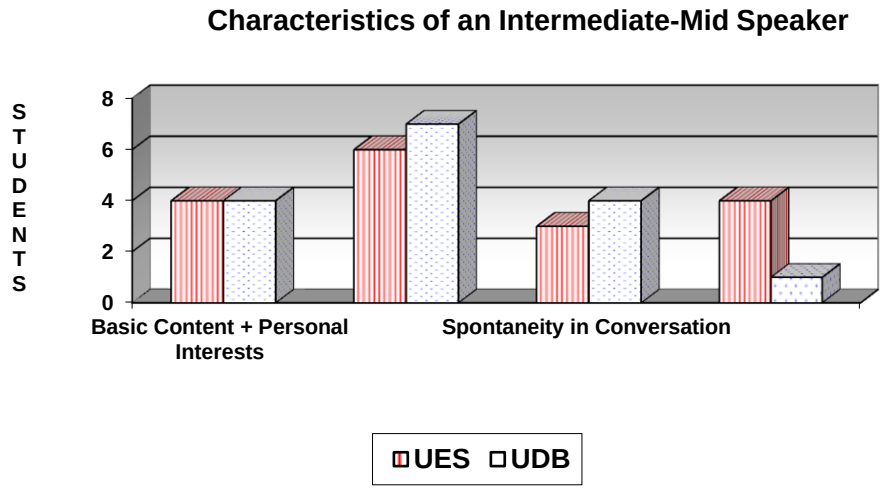
The following are graphic representations of the information obtained through the given Oral Proficiency Interviews.



Intermediate-Low speakers are able to make sentence length combinations of learned vocabulary and grammar in a limited number of content areas. The content areas consist of basic personal background, personal needs, social and routine tasks such as getting meals and receiving simple instructions and directions. Understanding is often uneven; repetition and rewording are often needed and misunderstanding in both main ideas and details arise frequently. (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines)

The University of El Salvador sample group consisted of 11 second year students.

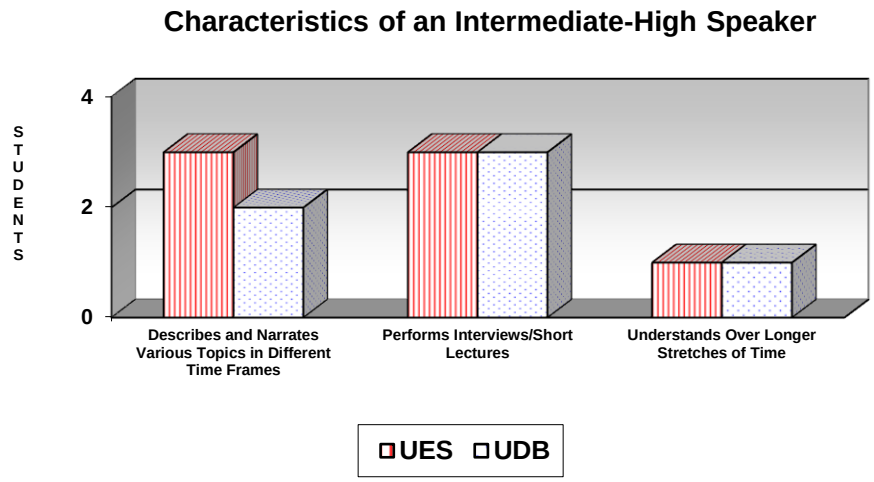
Don Bosco University had a sample group of nine second year students. Based on the 20 OPI´s administered to the sample groups it is seen that 11 students of the University of El Salvador and nine students of Don Bosco University understand basic content which indicates that they are able to communicate effectively and coherently in regards to their basic personal background, personal needs, social and routine tasks. It is also noted that eight students from the University of El Salvador and seven students from Don Bosco University were successful in simple directions and instructions. Nine students from the UES and seven students from UDB needed to have questions repeated or reworded. Six students from UES and seven students from UDB had frequent misunderstandings. This graph indicates that 80 percent of the combined second year students from both colleges demonstrated characteristics of an intermediate-low speaker.



An Intermediate-Mid speaker can refer not only to basic content and needs but can also converse on somewhat more complex tasks such as lodging, transportation, and shopping. Additional content includes some personal interests and activities and shows ability a

greater diversity of instructions and directions. Intermediate-Mid speakers show more spontaneity in conversation and although they still have misunderstandings they are fewer in number. (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines)

The above graph shows that four students from UES and four students from UDB were able to communicate effectively and coherently in regards to their basic personal background, personal needs, social and routine tasks and in addition they were able to converse on more complex tasks and personal interests and activities. Six UES students and seven UDB students were able to perform with greater diversity in receiving instructions and giving directions. Three UES students and four UDB students showed spontaneity in their conversations. Four UES students and one UDB student demonstrated less frequent misunderstanding. This graph shows that 41 percent of the two sample groups combined demonstrate the characteristics of an intermediate-mid speaker.



Intermediate-High speakers are able to connect on a variety of topics beyond the immediacy of the situation. These topics frequently involve description and narration in different time frames or aspects, such as present, non past, habitual, or imperfective. These topics may include interviews, short lectures on familiar topics and news items. They are able to sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse. Nearly all of

these characteristics are the same as an advanced speaker only that the level of comprehension is less in quantity and poorer in quality. (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines)

According to the recorded information three second year students from UES and 2 second year students from UDB were able to describe and narrate various topics in different time frames including present, non past, habitual and imperfective. Three students from both sample groups were able to interview the interviewer. Two students from both sample groups were able to understand for longer stretches of time within the conversation. This graphic indicates that 21 percent of the combined sample group demonstrated characteristics of an intermediate-high speaker. An addition to the above 20 student Oral Proficiency Interviews and 10 classroom observations, four essential books were selected along with an electronic source to gain bibliographical information 1regarding the above topics to be discussed. These books and internet articles are as follow: *ACTFL guidelines: Speaking*. 1999. SIL International. 25 June 2007, *Teaching by Principles An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* by H. Douglas Brown, *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* by Diane Larsen-Freeman, *Teaching Language in Context*, by Alice Omaggio Hadley, and *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* by Oxford, R.

On language learning the most common theories are Empiricism and the Rationalists. The Empiricists believe that all behavior comes from the stimulus-response (S-R). B.F. Skinner, the main proponent of the empirical theory believes that human language is a sophisticated response system that happens through stimuli and conditioning. Chomsky, contrary to the empiricist perspective, proposed the rational theory which takes the position that language is creative (not memorized), and rule governed (not based on habit). Rational theory is the leading theory in language learning today. The most influential proponent of

rationalism is Stephen Krashen and his infamous Monitor theory that states learning, i.e. grammar rules, is not as important as acquisition; the meaningful interaction of the target language such as natural communication where error correction should be minimal and the learners individuality should be taken into consideration while the main function of the classroom should be high motivation and low anxiety. (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.50-53)

Motivation is the key to all learning. Lack of motivation is perhaps the biggest obstacle faced by teachers and school administrators. The concept of motivation is often simplified as the difference between success and failure. However, such simplifications, although not considered to be wrong, need to be further explored in order to be applied appropriately to the classroom. There are two traditional motivation theories; extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsically focused people look for rewards such as money, prizes, and positive feedback. Intrinsically motivated people tend to not focus on rewards except for the feelings of competence and self-determination that come from reaching the goal. Extensive research has shown that intrinsic motivation plays a bigger role in a learner's motivation than the award receiving extrinsic motivation. Only one type of extrinsic reward can have an effect on intrinsic motivation and that is positive feedback. Traditionally, extrinsic motivation is used in the school system; school curriculum can be politically influenced, therefore not suited to the teacher or students needs, standardized testing excludes many students who test better by other means. Overall, the students are set to try to please the teacher and/or their parents and are not developing an internal thirst for knowledge. (Brown, 1993, pp.33-40)

Brown gives several examples on how to appeal self determination and competency in the language classroom: "Teach writing as a thinking process in which the learners develop their own ideas freely and openly…students create their own reading material for others in

the class to read…oral fluency exercises in which the learners talk about what interests them and not about a teacher-assigned topic…" (Brown, 1993, pp.42) Brown gives advice such as not to let students become dependent on the teacher's daily praise or feedback, to help them to set their own personal goals, to give the students choices in activities or topics and to make your subject matter interesting. To have an intrinsically motivated student is the goal of all motivational development.

Through the observations made at the University of El Salvador it was noted that the teachers did not provide the recommended motivation to their students. The classes were very repetitive; they were seen to be racing against time trying to cover the contents that were demanded by the administration to be completed. The students' needs or even the teachers' needs were not being taken into consideration. The contents covered were already prepared through the given text book and therefore the students were not given creative freedom to talk about topics of their interests. Personal goals were never asked, the UES teacher did provide positive feedback, even though Brown suggests that positive feedback should only be used occasionally so that the student does not work for your praise but for his/her own satisfaction "...many language students (even adults)...like to be told what to do, and they only do what is clearly essential to get a good grade -- even if they fail to develop useful skills in the process. Attitudes and behaviors like these make learning more difficult and must be changed, or else any effort to train learners to rely more on themselves and use better strategies is bound to fail." (Oxford, R.,1990, pp.10)

Don Bosco University's results did not differ substantially from the University of El Salvador; the classes were also routine and monotonous. They, too, had administrative pressure that did not reflect the students' best interest. Brown states that it is better to slow

down if necessary so that everyone understands fully the material being reviewed. However, many students seem to get left behind.

Brown states that by “considering students’ long term goals, their deepest level of feeling and thinking, and their global assessment of their potential to be self-actualized”…you will create higher self esteem in the classroom and have a positive effect in the student. (Brown, 1993, pp.44) Motivation is the teachers’ foundation for building their classroom environment, the first objective of the teacher in the beginning of their instruction process. However this was not a component of the classrooms observed.

There are many ways teachers can help their students become intrinsically motivated. Krashen writes of a mild level of anxiety, or "low affective filter" in the classroom and in the whole learning environment (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.50). The attitude the student has towards the learning environment, the teacher, the material, and towards his/her own self all affect this level of anxiety. A student will find it difficult to perform in a stressful environment.

Krashens’ affective filter hypothesis focuses on the significant consequences of a classroom that does not have optimal affective conditions. Optimal conditions motivate the learner, allows for self esteem, good self image and low anxiety. (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.51) One efficient way to provide an effective climate in the classroom can be to organize small group work to increase a student’s motivation and allow for a high security/safety level, permitting greater success. (Brown, 1993, pp.174) Brown also suggets to allow time between sessions or even just a small amount of time at the end of the class for the group to have open discussion, that way everyone feels like a team member and the teacher receives whole-class feedback. Affective factors also play a big role in

encouraging students to speak without anxiety of being judged by hearers. There is a very close relationship between poor performance and anxiety and tension in the classroom.

The foreign language classes of the University of El Salvador often divided the students into small groups but mostly when they were doing presentation assignments. Furthermore, they included time for feedback and group discussion. In addition the observed professor at the University of El Salvador was often observed laughing with his students and created a friendly safe environment. Don Bosco University was perceived to rarely assign small work groups to their second year foreign language students. They did, however, allow for feedback conversations. The professor was noted to be very serious and the climate was relatively tense in comparison to that of the classroom at the University of El Salvador. Also, although not often, on a few occasions it was noticed that other classmates laughed and made fun of their fellow classmates when speaking. Both the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University had difficulties in that the vast majority of the class were not willing to participate voluntarily. On numerous occasions the professors open ended questions were responded with complete silence.

Brown states that "a relationship is built on trust and respect and that leads to students' feeling capable, competent, and creative." (Brown, 1993, pp.421) He then gives a variety of suggestions as to how to build a student/teacher relationship. Some suggestions are to laugh with your students and not at them, work with them as a team and not against them and develop a genuine sense of joy when they learn something or succeed at a task. A professor needs to be patient and supportive without forgetting about his/her expectations of students, create a comfortable environment and elicit as much oral participation as possible from students, focusing on the quieter ones so that they can have plenty of

opportunities for trying things out. To develop a classroom that is secure will allow learners to become more interactive thus creating a better sense of oral proficiency.

The concept of interaction when learning a new language is a vital part of the learning process. This is due to the fact that language entails a plethora of different types of interactions such as verbal, non verbal, facial expressions, gestures and even cultural nuances of a language. Quite simply, "interaction is the heart of communication… the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other." (Brown, 1993, pp.159)

Unfortunately students at the observed universities are not often exposed to many interaction activities. For example the interaction viewed at both universities was limited to text book dialogues and discussions. They did not interact naturally therefore the students are not successful at communicating naturally in real life situations discussing real life circumstances.

Brown states how important it is to have one on one conversations or group conversations in the classroom allowing not only the teacher to produce conversational questions such as 'what is your favorite food' but also to prompt the students to ask questions to their classmates. Through these types of activities students can expand their knowledge about the language such as pronunciation, vocabulary, idioms, etc. even on a beginner's level. The reason he believes these activities are important is because one of the main difficulties of creating fluency in a conversational setting is the long process it takes a student to produce an answer. For example he or she wonders 'what do I say to this question' and then 'how do I say it grammatically and with the right pronunciation'. Interaction activities are useful tools in teaching foreign language and are considered to be

great techniques used to involve students with their learning. Active learning techniques are considered to be essential to learning a foreign language.

Brown states that techniques are defined as "the specific activities manifested in the classroom…" (Brown, 1993, pp.48) Brown informs the reader that before one can make a decision on what kinds of teaching techniques to be used in the classroom, one must identify two factors. First, a grounded knowledge of the overall approach of language learning, an extensive comprehension on how learners learn and how teachers facilitate the learning process must be achieved. Second, one must know who learners are, how proficient they are and what their goals in learning are.

Students at the beginner levels should use more teacher-centred techniques. This is due to their limited ability to initiated questions and responses. However, it is important to always foster communicative tasks and involve lower level classes in interactive activities. Beginning level classes will lean strongly on a teacher controlled environment since students at this level have no ability to control the class period. As proficiency is gained the teacher will focus on using less controlled techniques and put more emphasis on free student-centred techniques. Brown explains that techniques fall onto a continuum that one end represents high manipulation and the other end represents high communication/interaction. The extreme of the manipulated side consists of total teacher control with predicted student responses such as mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills. The other extreme of communication/interaction consists largely of student control and unpredicted responses. Examples of this would be story-telling, problem solving, information exchanges, etc. The following charts represent the second year English classrooms[1] at both of the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University and the techniques being utilized.

FREE TECHNIQUES FROM 2ND YEAR ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

TABLE A

TAXONOMY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING TECHNIQUES (Brown, 1993, pp. 142)	UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR			UNIVERSITY OF DON BOSCO		
FREE TECHNIQUES	***ALWAYS***	***SOMETIMES***	***NEVER***	***ALWAYS***	***SOMETIMES***	***NEVER***
ROLE-PLAY		X				X
GAMES			X			X
REPORT		X				X
PROBLEM SOLVING			X			X
DRAMA			X			X
SIMULATION			X			X
INTERVIEW	X				X	
DISCUSSION	X			X		
COMPOSITION		X			X	
A PROPOS			X			X

[1] Approximately five classroom assessments were taken from both universities.

CONTROLLED TECHNIQUES FROM 2ND YEAR ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

TABLE B

TAXONOMY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING TECHNIQUES (Brown, 1993, pp. 142)	UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR			UNIVERSITY OF DON BOSCO		
CONTROLLED TECHNIQUES	***ALWAYS***	***SOMETIMES***	***NEVER***	***ALWAYS***	***SOMETIMES***	***NEVER***
WARM UP	X			X		
SETTING	X				X	
ORGANIZATIONAL		X				X
CONTENT EXPLANATION			X			X
ROLE-PLAY DEMONSTRATION		X			X	
DIALOGUE/NARRATIVE DEMONSTRATION			X			X
DIALOGUE/NARRATIVE RECITATION	X				X	
READING ALOUD		X			X	
CHECKING		X		X		
QUESTION-ANSWER, DISPLAY	X			X		
DRILL		X				X
TRANSLATION			X			X
DICTATION		X				X
COPYING			X			X
IDENTIFICATION		X			X	
RECOGNITION			X			X
REVIEW	X				X	
TESTING		X			X	
MEANINGFUL DRILL		X			X	

These results can be seen in two ways. First, although these students are in the second year of their degree they have only taken two English courses prior to the class observed. Omaggio Hadley says that "controlled processing can be said to lay down the 'stepping stones' for automatic processing as the learner moves to more and more difficult levels." (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.55) Therefore, either second year students are still lacking competence due to insufficient classroom experience and the need for controlled techniques is very necessary in the classroom. Or, the high dependence on control techniques is because the professor/administration does not properly facilitate the learning process according to the expected proficiency level. At a second year level the majority of the classroom should be based on free techniques.

A University of El Salvador professor believes the problem is a combination of both factors. He generalizes that the main problem stems from the students who do not practice the language outside of the classroom and that it has a lot do to with their lack of motivation. He also stated that the students came into higher level classes with big deficiencies from previous levels. He explained that even though they had these deficiencies they were, without regard, promoted to the next level because oral proficiency only constituted a small percentage of what is required to pass the language course.

Therefore, although students made poor grades in oral skills, their grades in writing, listening and reading allowed them to advance to the next level. This represented a huge challenge to the following teacher when "intermediate" students practically refused to speak English in their advanced classes due to their weaknesses brought from their previous level. For this reason it can be understood why such a high reliance on controlled teaching techniques are still employed in the second year classrooms.

Techniques alone, however, are not enough to make a class successful. Most techniques involve the use of supporting materials to enhance the classroom experience. Although conversations, dialogues, role plays and black board work are necessary to teaching a new language, it is also vital to accompany these techniques with supporting materials such as pictures, maps, charts, audio visuals and realia. "The use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint the students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials alone." (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.82)

The two universities observed mainly relied on the use of the textbook, the textbook audio CD and the work book along with their classroom techniques. Omaggio Hadley states that just because a teacher has a text book doesn't mean that other supporting materials should be abandoned but "rather, a blend of the two seems more appropriate." (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.82)

Jorge Franco, a second year student from Don Bosco stated to have feelings of inadequacy when confronted with real life speaking situations such as conversations with native speakers and understanding news, movies and songs in English. Krashen advocates that "we can teach vocabulary, situational routines, grammar, whatever we like, and as long as we fill it with acquisition opportunities, as long as we keep providing comprehensible input, we are contributing to natural language acquisition."

Teaching techniques should always be developed within an authentic material environment to enable students to better develop their performance in real language situations.

Error correction is another relevant topic related to creating a high oral proficiency level and maintaining a positive affective climate in your classroom. Choosing error correction strategies which do not put the student in an embarrassing or singled-out position goes a long way in making the student feel comfortable enough to take risks in your language classroom.

Among the 10 classroom observations carried out in both universities, the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University, it was pretty common to find situations in which the teacher would interrupt a conversation to correct mistakes; whether it was choice correction or a different correction strategy. Nevertheless it is necessary for a teacher to be aware that the way that errors are corrected is an important aspect in developing high proficiency oral skills and developing a secure classroom environment.

Based on Krashen's theory of acquisition and learning, the Rationalist theory of thought is that when the goal is learning, error correction should be minimal in the classroom, but of no use when the goal is acquisition.

The acquisition is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires valuable interaction in the target language in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. The learning is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge about the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. According to Krashen learning is less important than acquisition. (Cited by Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.50 -53)

English teachers need to be very careful when correcting students because this practice raises the affective filter. The concern arises that error correction can provoke a

student's anxiety about what classmates might think about the student's performance. It is highly suggested that error correction should not be used in free conversations. Considering this, it is important to avoid error corrections or grammar instructions when developing communicative activities because this does very little to encourage lasting positive change in the learners' production. The better thing to do to is to give feedback which refers to the process of giving students information so that they can judge if their production or comprehension of the language is correct, from that, correction will come as a result of feedback.

Some error correction strategies state that when a student is attempting to master particular features of a language, direct immediate correction can be beneficial. However, when a student is engaging in free conversation or focused on any activity that is communicative and meaningful in nature, little to no correction is necessary. Also it is important to keep in mind that what works for one student may not work for another, therefore it is necessary to know the students personality characteristics, learning styles and learning preferences.

In order to help students produce more accurate speech one of the most important strategies is to constantly provide appropriate feedback, direct or indirect, immediate or delayed depending on the activity, its purpose and the individuality of the student.

"Language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their progress in developing *speaking* skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability." (Oxford, R.,1990, pp.18) Quite simply, a language strategy is a conscious thought or behavior used by a learner to improve the oral proficiency of the target language.

Throughout this paper the term strategy has been used on many occasions. Strategies can be different in nature, ranging from planning to the organization of one's learning (a metacognitive learning strategy) to the use of mnemonic devices to learn vocabulary (cognitive learning strategy).

Some metacognitive strategies that have been reviewed are developing students' goals, understanding their style of learning, error correction, employing interactive activities in the class, brainstorming, enriching a classroom with realia, authentic materials, addressing and understanding affective issues such as anxiety, motivation, beliefs and interests and utilizing free techniques that are more student based. Metacognitive strategies are very important; however they are only half of the answer to providing high oral proficiency, it is also of great significance for a student to be taught cognitive learning strategies.

Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies that they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it. The instructor helps students learn how to speak so that the students can use speaking to learn. Some examples of speaking strategies are as follows:

Repetition: imitating other people's speech overtly or silently. *Imagery*: visualizing information for memory storage – 'Pretend you are doing something indicated in the sentences to make up about the new word'. *Auditory representation*: keeping a sound or sound sequence in the mind – 'When you are trying to learn how to say something, speak it in your mind first'. *Key word*: using key word memory techniques, such as identifying a

target language word with a native language word that it sounds like. *Elaboration*: relating new information to other concepts in memory. *Inferencing*: guessing meanings by using available information – 'I think of the whole meaning of the sentence, and then I can get the meaning of the new word'. *Question for clarification*: asking a teacher or native for explanation, help, etc. (Oxford, R.,1990, pp.31-35)

More proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations than less proficient learners Research indicates that language learners at all levels use strategies (Oxford, R.,1990, pp.52), but that some or most learners are not fully aware of the strategies they use or the strategies that might be most beneficial to employ.

Clarification techniques are also very effective strategies to teach in the classroom. The three clarification techniques to be reviewed are *minimal response*, *recognizing scripts*, and *using language to talk about language*. These three clarification strategies should also be taught by the teacher so that the learner has the ability to effectively maneuver within a free flowing conversation. The following are explanations of these clarification strategies.

Minimal Response: Language learners who lack confidence in their ability to participate successfully in oral interaction often listen in silence while others do the talking. One way to encourage such learners to begin to participate is to help them build up a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of exchanges. Such responses can be especially useful for beginners.

Minimal responses are predictable, often idiomatic phrases that conversation participants use to indicate understanding, agreement, doubt, and other responses to what another speaker is saying. Having a stock of such responses enables a learner to focus on what the other participant is saying, without having to simultaneously plan a response.

Recognizing scripts: Some communication situations are associated with a predictable set of spoken exchanges -- a script. Greetings, apologies, compliments, invitations, and other functions that are influenced by social and cultural norms often follow patterns or scripts. So do the transactional exchanges involved in activities such as obtaining information and making a purchase. In these scripts, the relationship between a speaker's turn and the one that follows it can often be anticipated.

Instructors can help students develop speaking ability by making them aware of the scripts for different situations so that they can predict what they will hear and what they will need to say in response. Through interactive activities, instructors can give students practice in managing and varying the language that different scripts contain.

Using language to talk about language: Language learners are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them. Instructors can help students overcome this reticence by assuring them that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction, whatever the participants' language skill levels. Instructors can also give students strategies and phrases to use for clarification and comprehension check.

By encouraging students to use clarification phrases in class when misunderstanding occurs and by responding positively when they do, instructors can create an authentic practice environment within the classroom itself. As they develop control of various clarification strategies, students will gain confidence in their ability to manage the various communication situations that they may encounter outside the classroom.

Language learning styles and strategies appear to be among the most important factors influencing oral proficiency in a second language. Teachers need to become more

aware of both learning styles and learning strategies through appropriate teacher training. Teachers can help their students by designing instruction that meets the needs of individuals with different stylistic preferences and by teaching students how to improve their learning strategies.

This paper has presented substantial hypothetical reasons that suggest why the findings made through an experiment investigation showed low oral proficiency levels in two major universities of El Salvador. The purpose of this paper was to attempt to explain why the second year English students were found to be lacking in their oral proficiency levels. In order to understand why the oral proficiency levels were low first it was necessary to investigate through scholarly books the underlying reasons that create a successful orally proficient classroom. Each of these reasons; motivation, techniques, supporting materials, affective factors, learning strategies, error correction, interaction effect and so on play a very important role in the learners' ability to achieve high levels of oral proficiency. Through the comparisons of the elected academic books and topics reviewed and the classroom observations and OPI's conducted it was determined as to why the second year foreign language classrooms at the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University fail to meet their expected oral proficiency levels. Classroom deficiencies were detected and evaluated. Overall the content of this paper explains precisely and successfully why the two observed universities, the University of El Salvador and Don Bosco University, are not reaching their own set of oral proficiency standards in the classroom therefore indicating as to why the students in return are not, on average, meeting the oral proficiency levels expected at this point in their curriculum.

INTERPRETATION

Through the analysis of the information gathered through the class observations, teacher and students interviews it was possible to see that the University does not properly facilitate the learning process according to the expected oral proficiency level. The English program does not have an evaluation system to measure oral proficiency at any time during the process and in addition to that according to the classroom observations made in both universities it showed that students were not willing to practice the target language. It was very common to see that the teacher had to directly call on the students to participate. At a second year level, an intermediate high level, the majority of the classroom should be based on free techniques. According to Brown, at the intermediate high level the teacher will focus on using less controlled techniques and put more emphasis on free student-centred techniques which consists largely of student control and unpredicted responses. Examples of this would be story-telling, problem solving, information exchanges, etc. Nevertheless the classes were developed very attached to the book.

The two universities observed mainly relied on the use of the textbook, the textbook audio CD and the work book along with their classroom techniques. Omaggio Hadley states that just because a teacher has a text book doesn't mean that other supporting materials should be abandoned but "rather, a blend of the two seems more appropriate." (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.82)

Students do not practice the language neither inside nor outside of the classroom as a way of communication. Students also come into higher level classes with deficiencies from previous levels but since oral proficiency only constitutes a small percentage of what is

required to pass the language course, even with those deficiencies, they are, without regard, promoted to the next level. Although students may receive low grades in oral skills, their grades in writing, listening and reading allow them to advance to the next level. This represents a huge challenge to the following teacher when "intermediate" students practically refuse to speak English in their advanced classes due to their weaknesses brought from their previous level.

A satisfactory oral proficiency level reached by students is not the main goal of the English program. Their attention seems to be focused on covering the textbook content assigned at the beginning of the year. The English program does not emphasize the importance of a satisfactory oral proficiency; this is evident when the proficiency level only represents a very small percentage of the global grade necessary to be promoted to the next level. This lack of emphasis creates a situation where students do not to worry about their oral proficiency level and tend to focus more on other skills such as writing, reading, and listening. This phenomenon continues to show itself in the next level as well because even though they are not ready to start working on achieving the next oral proficiency level, they qualify to be promoted to it through the grades obtained in listening, writing and reading evaluations. This cycle of promotion with deficient oral proficiency creates an orally deficient program graduate. But, however orally proficient they were in their classrooms students can use other activities to get the necessary number of points to pass the course. The continuous promotion of students that do not reach the required oral proficiency leads to a massive number of students graduating perhaps with very good grades but not being able to feel comfortable when using the target language that they are expected to teach.

It is very frustrating for an English Major, having to go through a program that can take up to 6 years to be completed, being trained and certified to teach a language that he or

she does not speak with fluency and competency therefore being uncomfortable when using it. It was this very frustration found in the alumni that prompted this investigation

After concluding with this research the recommendations would be aimed first, to those in charge of designing the course programs to pay closer attention to what is happening regarding to oral proficiency and make reaching the expected oral proficiency level of every course determinant to go to the next level; it is also necessary to design an evaluation system that permits to measure how the students are doing regarding to their oral proficiency at the beginning, during and at the end of every English course. This type of evaluation system would allow teachers to be more aware of what each of the student's situation is regarding oral proficiency, and enable them to make special emphasis on those students showing weaknesses so that by the end of the course they would have had a whole semester to overcome any deficiency found. Second, it is necessary to encourage teachers to be more creative in their classrooms creating a comfortable environment with activities that will push the students to have discussions on a variety of topics. Teachers need to be more independent from text books and adapt the contents to real life communicative settings as much as possible. In addition, teachers need to make students aware of the necessity for them to speak English at all times inside and outside the classrooms so that they can practice what is taught through the lessons.

Having a program that prioritize the achievement of oral proficiency, teachers that foster more real life communicative settings and students that are conscious of the need to be proficient in English, it will be possible to have, by the end of the program, professionals that are more capable and confident with what they do and thereby being successful in their chosen field of work.

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ANNEXESS

Appendix

ACTFL Revised Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking

Oral proficiency includes the ability to communicate verbally in a functional and accurate way in the target language. The high degree of oral proficiency implies having the ability to apply the linguistic knowledge to new context and situation. (Omaggio Hadley, 1993, pp.76). Oral proficiency measures how well a person speaks a language by comparing their performance of specific language tasks, not with some other person's, but with the criteria for each of ten proficiency levels described in the ACTFL Revised Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking, published by ACTFL in 1999. ACTFL designed a test called Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI); this is a standardized procedure for the global assessment of functional speaking ability, or oral proficiency. The ACTFL OPI takes the form of a carefully structured conversation between a trained or certified interviewer and the person whose speaking proficiency is being assessed. A ratable speech sample is elicited from the interviewee by an individually determined series of questions or comments, which follow the established ACTFL protocol of "probes" and "level-checks." (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines) The following are the ten ACTFL proficiency guidelines:

- Superior speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate in the language with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives.

- Advanced speakers are able to consistently explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames.

- Advanced Mid speakers at the Advanced-Mid level are able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks.

- Advanced Low speakers are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times.

- Intermediate-High speakers are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with most routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level.

- Intermediate-Mid level speakers are able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations.

- Intermediate-Low level speakers are able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks by creating with the language in straightforward social situations.

- Novice-High level speakers are able to handle a variety of tasks pertaining to the Intermediate level, but are unable to sustain performance at that level. They are able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations.

- Novice-Mid level speakers communicate minimally and with difficulty by using a number of isolated words and memorized phrases limited by the particular context in which the language has been learned.

- Novice-Low level speakers have no real functional ability and, because of their pronunciation, they may be unintelligible.

University of El Salvador

School of Arts and Sciences

Foreign Language Department

Name: _____
University: _____

Objective: To define the sample that will be used for the Oral Proficiency Interviews on second year English students.

1. Have you taken any English course(s) outside the University? YES☐ NO☐

2. Have you ever lived in an English speaking country? YES☐ NO☐

3. Is this your first time taking this course? YES☐ NO☐

4. Do you have any relationships with a native English speaker? YES☐ NO☐

5. Have you ever travelled to an English speaking country? YES☐ NO☐

6. Have you ever worked in an English speaking environment? YES☐ NO☐