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ESSAY

TOEFL AS A REQUERIMENT FOR TAKING ECAP

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Considering the importance that evaluations have for students who are in a significant stage in a major, it is extremely necessary to analyze the proper usage that a determined test has. This paper is addressed to focus on TOEFL test and point out the appropriateness it possesses for being used as a requirement for pre-graduating students from the major of “Profesorado en Inglés Para Tercer Ciclo de Educación Básica y Educación Media (Plan MINED)”.

TOEFL Test lacks Validity in relation to the Specialized Area of the English Teaching Major, does not evaluate Oral Proficiency, it is not a reliable test because of the cultural aspects it has, it does not include any Pedagogical nor Didactical aspect for teaching the language, besides, the cost of \$130.00US is not accessible for most of the students of the University of El Salvador that belong to this major, finally, the required score of 520 points does not comply with the results that can be obtained in relation to the academic background of students of the English Teaching Major of “Profesorado en Inglés Para Tercer Ciclo de Educación Básica y Educación Media (Plan MINED)”.

The Ministry of Education determined the plans and programs of studies of the Teaching Majors based on the article 57 of the Law of Superior Education in the

year 1997. These programs were initially executed by 13 institutions of higher Education in the year 1998 (Objetivos Curriculares de los Programas de Estudio del Profesorado en Inglés para Tercer Ciclo de Educación Básica y Educación Media, Plan MINED, Marzo de 2002).

Making reference to some of the changes and applications that have been implemented specifically in the English Teaching Major, for instance, it can be mentioned, the requirement of an advanced level of English for those candidates of the major, furthermore, after finishing their studies, senior students are asked to take a test in which they are evaluated in their pedagogical and academical competences and are also demanded to get a minimal grade of 7.0 for students who graduate from the year 2003 on. This test is called **ECAP** (Instructivo para el Funcionamiento de Profesorado a partir del año 2003); and it has its legal bases on the Executive Agreement # 15-1913 with a date of November 1st , 2000, to be implemented since the year 2001 and it establishes “As a requirement to graduate of any teaching major since the year 2000, the approval of a Results Test that will be designed by the Ministry of Education” and also specified in the “Instructivo para el Funcionamiento de las Carreras de Profesorados”, given by the National Direction of Superior Education, Division of Teachers´ Formation, Chapter III. Literal B, Numeral 2 that expresses as a requirement of graduation, “To approve the Evaluation of Academic and Pedagogic Competences. (ECAP)”. The characteristic it possesses is that,

“...each of the tests (considering the specialty, in this case English) explores integrated parts of different components that provide the

domain of a knowledge that will be put in action before the specific problems of each area of the knowledge”

(Ministerio de Educación, (2000) ***Evaluación de las competencias académicas y pedagógicas, ECAP***. Dirección Nacional de Monitoreo y Evaluación, Dirección de Evaluación Educativa).

The ECAP is divided into two parts: **The Test of Academic Competences** that has a 60% of score and it includes the domain of the contents and theories of the discipline as the capacity of the student to design strategies for teaching this knowledge. The second part is **The Test of Pedagogic Competence** with a 40% of the total score, and it refers to the capacity of the student to comprehend the educational system and the role that he/she is to play on it. With this test, students are evaluated the topics on the subjects that were studied during the major, however, there have not been satisfactory results since the first time it was administered according to a research,

“ In general, the results of the first ECAP National wide were deficient and the score of the students from the University of El Salvador and the other institutions that administer programs of Teachers´ Formation were not very different: the global average for both sectors were under six point zero and the percentages of approved students were the 48% in the University of El Salvador and the 35% belonged to the rest of institutions of Superior Education”.

(Castro, N. C., & Oliva, J. I. (2001), Tesis: ***“Perfil de ingreso, currículo y factores asociados a los resultados en la evaluación de competencias académicas y pedagógicas”***, caso Universidad de El Salvador.)

As a matter of fact, there have been many difficulties that have affected these students due to the complexity of the topics included in it. From the evaluated students' point of view, they stated that, *“ECAP Test did not measure the knowledge, abilities and skills that we acquired in our academic formation process,”* (Castro & Oliva, 2002). Most of these test-takers are forced to repeat it trying to look forward to getting in the demanded average grade for speciality. Even though, the Ministry of Education has noticed the decreasing of the average rate in the ECAP during the last two years that is 6.0 in the year 2001 to a 5.6 during the year 2002, (Ministerio de Educación, Departamento de Educación Superior, 2002. Resultados prueba ECAP), ironically they have established that since the year 2003 the minimal grade for approving this test is 7.0.

After having determined the results of the ECAP for the last two years (2001-2002) the MINED has lately imposed a new requirement that was supposed to start February the 17th, 2003, this is TOEFL Test (Test of English as a Foreign Language), this test is designed to measure the level of English fluency among people who do not speak English as their native or primary language. The TOEFL Test is offered primarily to assist institutions in placing students in English courses at the appropriate level of difficulty or to determine whether additional work in English is necessary before an individual can undertake studies at an institution where English is the medium of instruction. The test is developed, prepared, and

administered by ETS --Educational Testing Services -located in Princeton, New Jersey. TOEFL has existed since 1965, and each year nearly 850,000 people sit for the test, which is offered at a variety of testing institutions around the world.

Its cost varies depending on the currency of the demanding country and/or institution that is to provide it, but in most of the cases its price is not less than a hundred US dollars. Its format consists of three major sections which are: Listening Comprehension that takes thirty minutes to finish it, Structure and Written Expresión, that lasts Twenty-five minutes, and finally the Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension part that lasts forty five minutes to be completed. Although TOEFL has been offered for almost thirty-five years, the 1990s has been a decade of great change for the test, that is to say that a new TOEFL format was introduced in July 1995 and it contains a slight modification of the original format that included the following: Section 1: Listening Comprehension (Part A: Dialogues 30 Items, Part B: extended conversations- 20 conversations-7-8 Items; Part C: Mini talks-Free talks-12-13 items).This section allowed 30 minutes. Section 2: Structure and written expression (Error Identification)- 25 items. This section allowed 25 minutes. Section 3: Reading Comprehension: 5-6 passages- 50 items (Including an increased number of vocabulary- in-context questions) this section allowed 55 minutes.

In July 1998, yet another format for TOEFL was introduced: the Computer Based TOEFL. The sections of this test are again based upon earlier TOEFL format; however, variations of questions, which are only possible on the new computer technology are now built into the exam. The TOEFL Test written format is the main tool that the Ministry of Education has considered for evaluating students

when they have already finished the total subjects of the program of studies. The Ministry of Education demands that,

“Para los estudiantes que ingresen a la carrera de Profesorado en Idioma Inglés a partir del año 2003, deberán demostrar haber aprobado el examen oficial del TOEFL con un puntaje superior a 520 previo a someterse a la prueba ECAP. Estos estudiantes para su inscripción en la prueba ECAP deberán presentar la constancia de haber aprobado el examen TOEFL...”

(Taken from: Ministerio de Educación, 2003, ***Instructivo para el funcionamiento de las carreras de los profesados***, Dirección Nacional de Educación Superior, División de Formación Docente, numeral II).

Relating to this aspect a member of the Direction of Teachers Formation claimed that,

“From the MINED point of view, it is really necessary to have future teachers of English know how much management of the language they have, that is why we have agreed in implementing TOEFL as a measuring test...”

(Osorio, A. **Personal communication**, March 17th, 2003).

It is essential to mention that nearly 20 million students of Higher Education from about 4,500 institutions in more than 165 countries worldwide have taken the

TOEFL test for being admitted in a Higher Educational institution since 1964. A number of academic institutions in other English speaking countries as well as certain independent organizations, agencies and foreign government offices, also use TOEFL scores to classify people's competence in the language. American Universities Admission Program releases its annual rankings of US Universities (for the undergraduate level) for international students. (The official web site for the TOEFL (2003) *The Future of TOEFL Testing*. from: [http:// www.toefl.org/](http://www.toefl.org/)). Taking into account that the TOEFL Test has a great importance as a worldwide examination and that its main purpose is **assessing students at many levels of English Proficiency and also to administrate a language placement at institutions at all levels of selectivity**. There are several aspects of this test that have not been considered by the Ministry of Education in relation to the current program of studies of the Major of "Profesorado en Inglés Para Tercer Ciclo de Educación Básica y Educación Media" (Plan MINED).

First of all, TOEFL test lacks **Content Validity** in relation to the topics taught to the students of the Specialized Area of the English Teaching Major. The objectives the MINED has in relation to this area for the English Teaching Major pretends students to,

"develop their ability of managing any curriculum that is provided to them in relation to the English Teaching Language. This objective is based on the idea that students will start their magisterial formation by having an advanced level of English from the beginning of the major".

(Ministerio de Educación. (2002). **Formación especializada del idioma Inglés**. (P.193). Departamento de Formación Docente, Dirección de Evaluación Educativa).

The Specialized Area of the English Teaching Major is structured by including subjects such as English Oral expression, Comparative Grammar, English and Spanish, Grammar and English Composition I-II, English Reading and Vocabulary I-II, English Language Didactics I-II (to be developed along the major), and also, Design and Application of Curriculum, among others. These subjects tend to provide students with the required knowledge to become qualified teachers. Students spend about 2 years and a half to approve the subjects before mentioned; however, there have emerged several opinions that consider TOEFL Test has no **Content Validity** for testing English Teaching Major students because it does not have any relationship between the subjects they have studied with the content of this test. Lawrence M. Rudner says that,

“There has to be a similarity between the content in study with the content that is interested in testing... experts have to be involved in the process in which they can elicit and select, under adjustment the most suitable items that are needed to evaluate”.

(Rudner, M. L. **Test Evaluation**, p.12. 1993).

Indeed, TOEFL is not related to an established curriculum, institutions use the scores as a base line from which to compare the proficiency levels of students

coming from diverse academic backgrounds. (TOEFL Organization. (2000). **The Purpose of TOEFL test**. Retrieved May 14, 2003, from: [http:// www.toefl.org/html](http://www.toefl.org/html)).

The TOEFL Test has limited efficiency if it is to be used for knowing about the students' use of their academic goals, for this reason it must be necessary to reconsider a suitable test in which the students are evaluated about the knowledge they acquired during the major. This must be a special test that accomplishes with the curricular objectives of the English Teaching Major with its contents. For doing so, it is essential to select a group of experienced professionals in the matter of evaluation and test preparation. Educators who are responsible for selecting the tests that will be used for students in a learning process must examine how close a test reflects the curriculum and standards being used in the educational system. As Menken(2000) points out,

“In order for assessments to be effective and useful for educators in instructional practice, they must be deeply entwined with the classroom teaching and learning driven by the standards...”

And continues:

“If tests are aligned with standards and curricula, students will have an increased chance of demonstrating what they know and are able to do. Teachers of English Language Learners need to be involved...committees are responsible for selecting appropriate tests, which should include

teachers to ensure that the tests selected for use are appropriate for these learners.”

(Educational Resources Information Centre. (2002) **English Language Learners and High-Stakes Tests: An Overview of the Issues**, Retrieved November 2002, from: [http:// www.esl.edu.com.org](http://www.esl.edu.com.org))

One more important thing to consider is that TOEFL Test has no **Predictive Validity**, that is to say that does not predict students` academic performance, even if a good student is required to take the test it cannot be ensured that he/she is going to pass it. In the cases where students are required to take the exam and have been previously trained it does not mean that the obtained results are to be satisfactory at the moment of being evaluated with the test; actually, there have been cases in which TOEFL Test has been administered to students that have the capacity of performing accurately in an oral way and at the very moment of being tested with this tool, their results have not been the most satisfactory ones; on the contrary, low performance students whose production of English is not that effective have found not many difficulties to solve parts of the test, and besides that, (in some cases) they obtain dramatically higher scores than the students previously mentioned. So, **Predictive Validity** is directed to reflect the proper use of items in exams to infer regarding achievement. **Predictive Validity** also includes comparison of performance on the test being validated against performance on outside criteria. Nelson Denny says that:

“the Reliability and Validity in TOEFL is extensive, however, it is a poor predictor of students success, and it also excludes important factors that are much more important to the students total success than the factors which the test is measuring”.

(Denny, N. (1994) ***The Nelson-Denny Test for ESI Students at College.***

Essay. Retrieved March 14th, 2003, from:

owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_html)

In relation to this, and as a result of a students´ survey, one of them replied:

“ An exam does not measure what we know”, she continues, “I think any test is enough to prove or measure the capacity that we, as students, have... If TOEFL measured all the knowledge of a student it would probably say that a student is good when he/she is really good, and bad when he/she actually performs badly but, the results are not the expected ones, because there are cases in which good students get bad grades and bad students pass the test”.

(Molina, I. ***Personal communication***, March12th,2003).

So, it is necessary to consider that a test such as the TOEFL is a poor predictor of the students´ capacity and success, an aspect that can affect students that have performed well and obtained excellent scores during the major and want to get this requirement to be allowed to take ECAP. Ellis Ivey says:

“ A fair test is one that looks at the positive accomplishments of that person, for instance, if we were to evaluate the faculty of any college, should we use a test of ability based on the norms for faculty members in the United States, or would it be more fair to look at what each faculty member has accomplished?”

(DENNY, N., (1994) ***The Nelson-Denny Test for ESI Students at***

College. Essay. Retrieved March 14th, 2003, from:

owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_html).

Referring to this opinion, the evaluation of the student must depend on the teacher's experience and judgement. The students' grades should not only be based on their accomplishments, but mainly on their abilities, this means that evaluators must pay close attention to what the students are able to do in the practice, in reference to the knowledge they have acquired during the learning process; and the most important fact is that educators must be cautious when interpreting the test results of English second language learners. It is crucial to remember that one test can not accurately reflect everything that a person knows and is able to do; this point is particularly important if the validity and reliability of the test were questionable for ESL, or if the students were not given appropriate testing accommodations; in any case, important decisions should not be based on a single test score.

Another important fact is that TOEFL test does not possess **Content Validity** that refers to the extent to which the test questions are representative of the skills in the specified domain, it means that TOEFL does not measure the content of interest that in this case must mandatorily be the contents studied in the Specialized Area of the English Teaching Major; besides, the way in which TOEFL Test is structured only measures students' knowledge of the English Language but not the specific academic subjects that have them learn about the important pedagogical and academical aspects that will qualify them as good Teachers of English. Another interviewee student expressed:

“If I am evaluated with the contents I have been immersed there will be no problem, however, if the exam includes contents which are far away from the program we are involved in, it would not be fair to be evaluated in such a way for all the dedication, effort, time and deliverance we have spent in our studies”

(Joya, C. **Personal communication**, March 13th, 2003).

Supporting this idea, it is important to consider that students are aware of the real situation that is to happen at the moment of taking a test in which they have not been previously trained and the most important fact, that does not specifically evaluate them what they have studied through the major. The members of the Extern Commission Group of the Initial Formation of Teachers refuse the TOEFL as a requirement to take the ECAP because they consider that,

“The TOEFL Test does not evaluate the capacity of teaching the English Language. That is why they (MINED authorities) should evaluate the pedagogic competences of the Basic Area as well as the ones that belong to the Specialized Area”.

(Miembros de la Comisión Externa para la Formación Inicial de Maestros. (February 28th, 2003) **Carta Oficial de Contra Propuesta** P. 2. Literal A.4.c. San Salvador).

Concerning this argument, it is possible to give several reasons why TOEFL is not the type of test that accomplishes with the real purpose a test should have for evaluating students in the areas before mentioned and who are about finishing the major, in addition, when students are demanded to take the subjects that compose a major is because it is intended to organize an education in which students can have the opportunity to take the annual plan of professional updating with

“a course of the specialty for each semester, that can last 40 effective hours at least. English Major subjects are then, “the result of a continuous search of negotiation of meanings in an interpersonal act, so for teaching a second language from the perspective of the communicative focus”.

(Ministerio de Educación (2003) **Instructivo para el funcionamiento de profesorado a partir del año 2003**. Dirección Nacional de Educación Superior, División de Formación Docente).

In the case of English Oral Expression and English Language, English Composition among others, are examples of how a student can interpret with ability cultural references and figures of the language, The purpose is clear, then, to give value the communicative teaching, without leaving apart Teaching-Learning Theories and Methodological focus that will allow the future professional to solve situations in the teaching field when planning, developing and evaluating for his/her school environment. A student of the English Teaching Major declared that,

“ far away from being demanded of an advanced level of English at the beginning of the major, we have to deal with the uncertainty of knowing that failing TOEFL will obligate us to waste time to wait for repeating it, if it were possible... and the worst situation is that there’s another requirement test (ECAP) for being approved in my whole major.”

(Hernandez, D. A., **Personal communication**. March 20th, 2003).

In fact, students are affected since the beginning of their studies because of the requirement of an advanced level of English because they are forced to extend their time of studies to achieve it, after that, they find the difficulties of dealing with the complexity of the subjects that in some cases they fail and, this gets also a time-consuming situation; moreover, if the Ministry of Education keeps on including more and more “obstacles” for them to finish, then, it results kind of unfair to include an extra requirement that does not match too much with the specific purpose that the major has. In addition, what is then, the reason TOEFL is to be considered as one of these requirements for English Language pre-graduated students? TOEFL only

places fresh students in different levels according to their knowledge of the language and it does not deal with anything related to the Didactics and Pedagogies of the major. Besides, Didactics competences that a future Teacher of English must have, are to be evaluated in relation to the learned ability he/she has about the language in a didactical and pedagogical way.

Taking TOEFL test limits students' functionality and provides with poor information about the revision of their Didactic process, all this concerning that, a Teacher of English must know not only about the language and its generalities, but also about the ways, techniques and methods related to the Teaching-Learning Process of English for English Second Language Students, and so, the MINED could obtain "*reliable information about any adjustment that are to be done with the purpose of searching quality in education*" (Ministerio de Educación. (2002). ***Orientaciones generales sobre el proceso evaluativo***. Dirección Nacional de Monitoreo y Evaluación. Dirección Nacional de Evaluación Educativa,) Considering the fact that students are a very important part in the development of the major, one of the opinions received from the group of students that were interviewed is:

"If I were interested in just learning generalities about the English Language I would have simply chosen a private academy, however my intentions of being at a university are more than learning how to speak the language".

(Rivas, V. E. ***Personal communication***. March 21st, 2003)

This opinion shows that students are deeply involved in their academic development, and more than that, they do not accept to be an experimental group for decreasing the demanding of that major.

Another aspect to judge is that TOEFL Test does not evaluate the **Oral skill**; this means that there are no items that are related to evaluate oral production from students who are to take it. TOEFL Test only makes emphasis on the Listening, Reading, Writing and sub skills such as Structure and Grammar. Nevertheless Lic. Adalberto Elias Campos, Director of Superior Education and the ex-Minister of Education, Licda. Evelyn Jacir de Lovo believed that,

“TOEFL might be a satisfactory evaluating test due to its complexity and also for the different parts that permit students put into practice the skills that have to do with their English Learning Process... for example, they can deal with structures and listening at the very moment of taking the exam”.

(Osorio, A. **Personal communication**, March 17th 2003).

However, in view of its importance,

“The Oral production is one of the most necessary tools a teacher has to manage when teaching a class and more than that, the grammatical structure management is completely important for the communicative focus that is oriented to the eventual achievement of proficiency levels in which accuracy of the oral production is the most important goal”.

(Ministerio de Educación (2002) ***Orientaciones generales sobre el proceso evaluativo, ECAP 2002: Evaluaciones de las competencias académicas y pedagógicas de los estudiantes de último año de profesorados***, Departamento de Educación Superior, Dirección de Formación Docente).

If the main purpose of this major is to provide those future Teachers of English with the ways of teaching students to speak a second language correctly, the use of the linguistic code, which includes the vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation rules, spelling, word formation, phrases and sentences construction, this means that every student in the major has to develop these important features that will help them become accurate teachers. No reliable result can be expected from all the students at all and not bearing in mind this important skill like speaking in an exam for students in this major, would not be beneficial in terms of learning quality. If there were a possibility of evaluating students throughout the major depending on the knowledge they are acquiring, and the level they have reached, it would be more beneficial than submitting students in a test in which this skill is not included. In this sense, it is important to call on that even the most experienced Teachers of English of Higher Education assume that there would be unsatisfactory results if the MINED applies this test, due to they have not made the right decision when selecting TOEFL as a requirement, and as MTI. Nicolás Ayala expressed, *“MINED has tried to implement programs of studies by following the same patterns used by government entities in other countries.”* (Ayala, E. N. ***Personal communication***. March 28th, 2003), but the problem has been that due to the complexity of these programs it is almost impossible to obtain the same results

because of the difference between the reality of national education and the established objectives of each government.

If the Ministry of Education had the same significant interest of supporting projects for the development of the Teachers Initial Formation System Salvadorean Education reality would better accomplish with the educational development that other countries possess. Yet, Salvadorean Education has been facing difficulties such as the Civil War, Recession, natural disasters, and the remarkable poverty among others. For that reason, it has not been able to develop any successful program that can provide the society with favourable academic results, and nowadays, the Ministry keeps in trying, according to University Professors of English“ to decrease the population of the students who want to become (English) Teachers ”. (Oliva, 2003.)

As it was said before, test-takers and again, future teachers of English would obtain good enough grades, the obtained grade would not totally show the students` knowledge in a reliable way. Not all societies are the same, even though, some similarities can be considered, it has never been assumed that those results are to be the same, the ways in which students perform depends on the way how a teacher sets the correct atmosphere and environment to teach a class, students react academically well if they are immersed in an environment in which they are given enough confidence and the facility to practice their oral ability; on the other hand it is important to consider the other side that could affect these students,

“I feel more comfortable when the teacher I have is the one who evaluates me, because he knows the process in which we have been learning, even though, I feel really upset, nervous, desperate and expectable when knowing that I’m to be evaluated in an exam that does not have anything to do with the program of studies I have been immersed in... I have never received any preparation course for taking an exam such as TOEFL and I do not really know what that is about”.

(Cisneros, J. **Personal communication**. March 18th, 2003).

After finishing their studies, students must be required to be tested the appropriate way that is to include the main topics that have been developed, but with a test such as TOEFL students do not have the opportunities to prove that they are able to perform as teachers of English, ironically, they would be tested in a way in which the obtained results would show only part of how they really manage their knowledge proficiency in language use. The complexity of students’ test selection is all the time difficult, and in relation to one that has to do with a teaching major, results more difficult. Moreover, MINED representatives have selected TOEFL without paying attention to the kind of test this one represents. In an interview with Lic. Osorio ,he stated:

“Up to we know the commission in charge of the selection of the test to be the requirement to the students was slightly considered by the complexity of its items and the importance and prestige that it has, besides this test has

been used by many institutions around the world and it has displayed good results”.

(Osorio, A. **Personal communication**. March 17th, 2003).

But even when this test has been selected by this commission that is supposed to have enough experience in the testing field and as Lic. Amilcar Osorio mentioned, people from other countries helped them to approve the selection of a test like TOEFL, countries that have used it in their curricular plans to place Fresh Foreign Language students of English in their universities. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point on the fact that such a test does not match for obtaining evaluation results of pre-graduated students of an English Teaching major. In relation to this fact, it is essential to mention what one of the interviewed students expressed:

“TOEFL is pretty far from the Salvadorean cultural aspects and this makes it more difficult to solve for the incomprehensible parts we can deal while being tested and besides the vocabulary is much more formal than the one that is taught in the classrooms”.

(Rivas, V. E. **Personal communication**. March 21st, 2003)

If TOEFL Test had the intention of evaluating future teachers to know about the correct performance they have in relation to the knowledge learned through their studies, it would have a specific part to evaluate the oral production of test takers. Even though, TOEFL does not determine a perspective of oral English

Language ability, and considering that test-takers will obtain a grade that will determine whether they are able to continue taking the last requirement (ECAP Test) to graduate from the English Teaching Major, this test is not enough to sort pre-graduated students in the level they are really placed in relation to their knowledge according to the major. If this test provided specific information about students development in the ability to speak clearly and fluently, by using situations they may encounter in a real academic setting when playing the role of professionals in the English Major, it would probably then be considered as the correct type of test to grade them.

TOEFL test is not a reliable test for students of the English teaching major because of the cultural aspects it properly possesses. This aspect makes reference to all the topics contained in the TOEFL that in most of the cases are far away from the topics used by the Ministry of Education to teach students in the teaching Majors in a higher level. Making an allowance for the interviewed students' opinion an exam like TOEFL does not measure neither abilities nor knowledge they acquire in their academic formation process. Another student's opinion was,

"In my opinion, I have lived in North America and I find difficult the fact that students deal specifically with topics that are exclusively connected with the Anglo-American culture, this means that all the items TOEFL contains are related only with facts of this culture and they are farly away from ours, for that reason, this would not be beneficial for students in our country because it does not accomplish with the cultural aspects of education in our society".

(Joya, C. *Personal communication*, March 13th, 2003).

As it was said before, the TOEFL test is offered primarily to assist institutions in placing students in English courses at the appropriate level of difficulty or to determine whether additional work in English is necessary before an individual can undertake studies at an institution where English is the medium of instruction. It is important to establish that TOEFL does not include topics in the test-takers' own culture, that is why students are exposed to lots of difficulties that in most of the cases get students confused and unfamiliar with the English they have been exposed to during their Teaching-Learning process. While being in the major students are exposed to invaluable information about the language, for example they learn about word formation, structures, vocabulary, reading and comprehension, etc, moreover, TOEFL Test has American standardized and cultural aspects that can be sorted specifically to the Anglo-American customs and culture. Some parts of these cultural aspects do not allow students obtain good results, and this does not mean they are in a low proficiency level; the problem is that these cultural aspects are extremely far from the developed topics of the major in which students have acquired the knowledge about it.

What is more, to evaluate aspects of a foreign language is not merely to evaluate how to communicate but also to discover how to manipulate grammatical forms, sounds, and meanings. In the case of an evaluation like TOEFL students must be trained in advanced with cultural aspects that this test includes, for instance, immersion in literature and the arts, and lowbrow information, which may

focus on the customs, habits, and folklore of everyday life (Kramersch, 1993: 24) for being able to face any cultural situation that could produce them a shock or a misunderstanding of a situation and/or context when being exposed to this exam.

In any case, students who are supposed to take TOEFL test should have been exposed, during their process of teaching formation, to the kind of knowledge that is familiar with the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country (in this case with the culture that is enhanced with the Anglo-American culture); so that, it is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, and many teachers have seen it as their goal, to incorporate the teaching of culture into the foreign language curriculum to have success in such a test. Even though, the MINED imposes this test that differ in many aspects with the Plan of Studies of the teaching major and also in specific parts that compose it culturally, as for example, the Reading Comprehension part in which there are several questions that require test-takers to have a good and a complete understanding of the passage that it is being read. This means that, rather than need to look for individual parts of information in the text, test-takers are required to demonstrate that they understand such things as the topic of the passage, the central idea of the passage and the general attitude of the writer. When students are exposed to new information, first, they acquire the new content and after that, they make a relation between their surrounding environment with the way this new knowledge they are presented.

In TOEFL case test-takers are required to answer questions based on the content of a given passage and these passages are of formal style and academic content. They are often extracts from university texts or advanced encyclopedias

with topics related exclusively with Higher Education in the American Universities and that present a variety of academic subjects, that is everything that could be taught at any university in the United States that in varied ways can only cause misunderstanding and lead to cross-cultural miscommunication. Therefore, TOEFL test makes evident that there are limitations of the test-takers' hard-won communicative competence, with their ability to make sense of the world that the test is presenting them. As a matter of fact, there have been lots of situations in which test -takers have misunderstood topics and what is more, they have assumed at the very moment of examining that they have already comprehended the cultural aspects involved in the exam as a whole, but what has really happened to them is a cross-cultural misunderstanding. In other words, they can query their own assumptions and try to see the underlying significance of a particular term or word in the target language and culture. For example, in English culture, both animals and humans have feelings, get sick, and are buried in cemeteries.

In Hispanic culture, however, the distinction between humans and animals is great, and bullfighting is highly unlikely to be seen as a waste of time, as many western spectators are apt to say. For Spanish people, a bull is not equal to the man who kills it -a belief that has the effect of exonerating- so to speak, the bullfighter from all responsibility; a bull can be strong but not intelligent or skillful; these are qualities attributed to human beings. In this light, notions such as "cruel," or "being defenseless" carry vastly different undertones in the two cultures (Lado, 1986). In view of this, it would be beneficial to spot out Politzer's words that say:

"if we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning..."

(Politzer, 1959, P.100-101).

Furthermore, the cultural knowledge that test-takers must deal with in the exam to perform accurately in it has to do with American organizations and familiar situations, religious facts, and other institutional fields. Besides, test-takers are required to know specifically about Ecology and Technology included knowledge of plants and animals, health care, travel etc. As Singhal notes:

"It is evident that one would have to be quite knowledgeable in the culture under study to be able to present all of these aspects accurately to second language learners".

(Singhal, 1998, P.25)

Inclining to believe that test-takers can work in the correct way in the test, it would be supposed that they have been trained in similar evaluations. The Ministry of Education does not provide any helpful tool for the students' preparation stage, on the contrary they are demanded to take TOEFL without having built up the favourable academic knowledge and conditions and, of course, the curricular modifications it might imply for the students to get familiar with the test . In view of this, it is reasonable to assert that students will certainly face lots of difficulties with

TOEFL test due to the cultural aspects it properly possesses. Some examples of this situation can be:

Example 1.

*“ One of the foremost American entertainers of the first part of the 20th century was a part – Cherokee Native American named Will Rogers (1879 – 1935). Rogers was born in a territory that would later become the state of Oklahoma and spent much of his youth riding horses and the ability to become a **muleteer**. These skills were refined into an entertainment act based on fancy rope tricks interspersed with humorous anecdotes and witty remarks...”*

What does Muleteer mean?

- a) To lead Assess*
- b) To train somebody*
- c) To pasture animals*

(GEAR, J. & GEAR, R., (2002) ***Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL Test***, Reading part, Third edition, Cambridge University. Cambridge University Press.

In this example, it is presented a paragraph in which a North American cultural topic is developed and it might be related with possible misunderstandings due to the lack of previous students' knowledge about this culture. Indeed, a test-taker that has not been involved with these aspects, and the way North American people have developed their own history could lose the score assigned to this part

just because he/she does not know what the topic is about and not because he/she does not possess the academic grammatical capacity. Actually, this paragraph would not have sense at all, and even when dealing with this kind of structures and their correct usages, could be more than difficult to select the correct response.

Example 2.

“Insolvency, as understood by the enquiry receivership courts in the USA, means that in ability to pay debts as they become due. In England, the fact that somebody maybe insolvent does not entail any particular procedure the US Federal Bankruptcy act defines insolvency as a situation in which the aggregate of the debtors property is insufficient to cover his debts.

Which of the following would be a suitable title for this passage?

A- Procedures entailed by insolvency

B- Bankruptcy

c- Insolvency

TAYLOR, J. & MOORE, P., (2002), ***Prepare and Practice for the Computer-Based TOEFL Test***. Expressed Publishing. Princeton. N. J. 2001.

Another example, like the one above, shows that foreign students in most of the times, are not related in any way with economics nor legal aspects of the American society and therefore it enables test-takers to obtain high scores in this

part of the TOEFL test. Students might deal with a great amount of vocabulary and the fact of being accurate when using it; however, it does not mean that they are able to comprehend and manage the laws, restrictions and obligations related to the United States conditions of living.

Example 3.

*Children dress up in witches' hats or gobbling suits to play pranks when celebrating the ancient pagan holiday of Halloween. **In contrast,***

A- Halloween is not a traditional holiday.

B-Halloween is always celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November.

C-Families dress more formally and set elegant tables for the most serious occasion of Halloween.

D- Children enjoy Halloween.

(GEAR, J. & GEAR, R., (2002) **Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL Test**, Reading part, Third edition, Cambridge University. Cambridge University Press.

What is more, people who have never lived in the United States might not be able to know some specific information like the date, the activities or the period of time it takes, and therefore the obtained score would decrease from the total percentage of this exam. The language and the contents of the previous examples show how Anglo-American culture differs from proper customs from the TOEFL test-takers, due to they are not linked in any way with the curricular program of studies they have received. In addition, students learn cultural aspects in an implicit way when the teacher develops topics during classes or when assigning homework.

The topics with which students learn structures, include cultural aspects that go implicit in the development of each topic during the major, but this information does not provide enough bases for the students to be considered experts at the moment of dealing with cultural aspects TOEFL test presents.

In relation to the established score for accepting a student to take ECAP, MINED demands a high score for being approved, (520 points) all this before submitting the ECAP Test. It is well known that in formal institutions such as North American and European universities as well as other institutions require high scores of TOEFL for being admitted; for this reason, it is important to mention that there are universities in the United States that are sorted according to the level of acceptance, and also because of the level of exigency they have; for instance by the years 2000 and 2001, about 368, 415 candidates worldwide took the mandatory TOEFL English Language Test in the most prestigious American universities. Harvard University only took less than tree percent of international students. It looks for many like an “Impossible Mission”, for this reason students find it better to apply in other universities. Harvard has now been dethroned by the New York University (NYU) and Columbus University sharing the second place of acceptance with Harvard. These Universities together have been ranked according to the percentage of score they demand to students who want to submit an application for a Master Degree: Category A, Category B, and Category C. Universities in category A, are the most prestigious ones in which the lowest score for a student to be accepted is 620 points; Universities in category B demand their candidates to obtain an average of 550 points or higher. In relation to the Universities in category C, the

demanded score for applicants is non-less than 500 points (<http://www.usjournal.com/en/students/info/toefl.html>). A 1999 study by the British Association of Lecture for Academic Purposes indicated recommended minimum entry levels were:

Chart 4.

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)	Paper Pencil TOEFL	Computer Based TOEFL
7.0	600	250
6.5	570	230
6.0	540	207
5.5	520	190
5.0	500	173

Bearing in mind the information gathered, and the complexity of the current requirements of the English Teaching Major, including TOEFL test, it is crucial to have the Ministry of Education understand some facts, all this with the aim of affording possible effective changes that can lead Salvadorean Education development into the correct system, a system in which students can feel closely identified with the program of studies in which they are immersed. Without a doubt, there is a huge contrast between the real educational scheme and the considerations the Salvadorean Ministry of Education does in relation to the requirements that are being demanded for the English Teaching Major. For instance, the level of proficiency students possess when starting their Higher

education studies is deficient in relation to the educational programs in which the students in developed countries are immersed; that is why the Ministry of Education cannot consider the development of requirements that might have functioned in an excellent way in other countries and in other educational environments, because every country has its own systems and the way they work depends absolutely on the real social circumstances.

In the same line and as it was said before, examinees might be limited and blocked in their intentions to continue their graduation process because of the lack of economic sources, due to as Lic. Elías Campos stated: “Such a test will have an extra cost to be taken, and its total price will be of an amount of \$130.00 US” (Ramos, W. 2003, ***MINED exigirá TOEFL a futuros maestros de Inglés***. La Prensa Gráfica, Febrero 28, 2003 P.12) Several reasons can be given for not accepting TOEFL as part of the amount of requirements of pre-graduated students, so educators must make critical decisions concerning how to include students in high stakes tests in ways that are fair and that address their needs. Some factors to consider can be the selection of appropriate testing accommodation and the accurate accommodations of test results. An amount of \$130 US is almost the equivalent of the minimal salary that a worker earns in a month in the Salvadorean society. Although there is another way of developing it, that is the Institutional way in which students have the possibility of paying a much lesser price that is about \$50.00 US but the students must also mandatorily pay it. Furthermore, it is important to mention the possible difficulties that could bring to those students who pretend to start in an English Teaching Major because the percentage of them

who start with it, come from public institutions where the dominant social status is the low-high and in few cases the mid-low levels. In this sense, it was determined that,

“Most of the pre-graduated students from the Teaching majors share some common characteristics that are obstacles for their process of formation: For instance, most of these students come from very poor families and urban regions from the country where the educative institutions come with less sources, for example from national institutions where, according to the PAES data, the scores have been the lowest national wide and show a very weak academic formation”.

(Ministerio de Educación, (2001) **Perfil de Ingreso, Currículo y Factores Asociados a los Resultados en la ECAP**. Departamento de Educación Superior, Dirección de Evaluación Educativa).

And for that reason, an interviewee student responded:

“Sometimes three members of my family eat from the same plate of meal. The economic situation of full time students is worrying due to a great part of us come from the rural zone of the country, and it is easy to observe that some of us are forced to eat at the cafeterias, with lots of limitants, and some others do not have the opportunity to get their meals that are beneficial for them to perform well academically.

(Salazar, J. F. **Personal communication**. March 13th, 2003).

This opinion reveals that students are conscious about their economic limitants and the hard efforts they and their family face for supporting their studies. It is necessary to reconsider that when the MINED establishes statutes for students population, (in this case \$130.00USD for a TOEFL Test payment), students of low economic sources are the most affected ones. The government entities must take into account that not all students who take a Teaching Major have the possibilities of affording themselves, but just with the help of someone in their family the students are able to go through the major. TOEFL Test must be mainly used as part in the process of the Curricular Program, but including it as a good resource of information to measure the students' proficiency in specific areas of the total knowledge of the major and besides in determined periods of time of the major. It must not be considered as an achievement test because it is already established that TOEFL does not possess the characteristics of becoming a test in which students are to demonstrate their academic knowledge, but on the other hand, as it was said before, TOEFL would only be useful to place students in different course levels according to their proficiency and accuracy of the English Language. Another important fact is that the Ministry of Education has not yet established what institution and in which way will this test be administered, due to the unique place that has been authorized to certificate it, is Don Bosco University.

Pointing the aspects that were previously mentioned, it would be reasonable to get interested in knowing if the test development procedure for the English Teaching Major follows a rational approach that ensures appropriate content of the TOEFL test with the program of studies of the Teaching formation,

besides, the process of the test must ensure that the collection of items is representative of appropriate skills. There must be an exhaustive study to reveal what basis impeded MINED to select the set of items that TOEFL test has and why only Reading, Writing and Listening skills have been considered to evaluate students with this test and, for that reason, it is important to know why the Oral skill - that is considered as an indispensable skill to be used in the teaching field – has not been taken into account.

The Ministry of Education has to deeply analyze the general aspects that TOEFL test contains looking forward to finding the weaknesses it possesses since its main purpose is to place students in different stages of the English knowledge, so that, TOEFL test must not be administered as a knowledge measuring test when it really has the specific function of being a placement test. All these aspects must be closely related to the plan of studies which has been designed by the Commission of Curricular Plan of the Ministry of Education. Moreover, it would be beneficial for the students, who are to be the test-takers, to know the real reasons why they are to be evaluated with this kind of test and what determined it as the most suitable one to be the pre-requisite at the end of the major. All these aspects, considering that this is the only major in which MINED is demanding three requirements to integrate candidates and to graduate them at the end of it: first, an advanced level of English to beginning the major, then, TOEFL as a requirement for taking ECAP test, and finally, ECAP test.

Thus, and in consideration of what is being demanded, it should be elaborated a test that better accomplishes to the type of studies in this country, that

is to say, a test that contains all the aspects that involve students who are wrapped up in current programs of studies in the basic Salvadorean educational field (Secondary and High School) as bases to continue their academic and professional development. Most of the studies that have been developed in relation to test-taking have determined that an exam does not reveal what a student really knows or what he/she is able to do. It is worth that MINED provides students and teachers with information about how this test is structured, its components, the advantages and disadvantages when being evaluated with it; moreover, it is essential to let the Ministry understand that evaluating students with TOEFL in this major is convenient if it is used as a source to find out if students have reached specific levels of knowledge in determined stages of the major.

Because the TOEFL test does not contain any part for evaluating the Oral Skill, there must be different stages during the whole major in which students can be evaluated in this skill with the contents and structures that test-takers are supposed to manage, and of course, this examination must be prepared by Expert Professors of English in the field of evaluation, for it is not that easy to select a test and implement it as an educational control quality without paying attention to the proper items, the coherence and the clarity, and evidently that must be part of the original design of the program of English Teaching Formation.

As a beneficial part for this term, it is very important to bear in mind that there are possibilities to design examinations in which can be included the proper test-takers' cultural aspects that certainly could help them understand better the demanded contents. Besides, the entities of Higher Education must consult expert professors in the English Teaching Major to grasp their valuable experiences and suggestions

with the purpose of collecting the most objective contents to design a tool (in this case an exam) that can be completely accessible for the test-takers without limitants of any kind. The Ministry of Education must have chosen another type of instrument, in contrast with TOEFL test, a tool that best measures students' learning, and in this way it can be possible to analyze the real situation the Salvadorean Education is immersed in at this moment, and the amount of help that could be essential for improving the ways in which teachers in this branch are to be prepared in the future and are to be evaluated during their major. It is important to state that educational proposals must go through the development of a curriculum designed by specialists considering the interests and necessities the educative population demands, and also the establishment of exams that more than affecting students, come to create a challenging quality improvement in the Salvadorean Educational Field.-