A Study of the English Teaching Practice at a Language Institute

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the pedagogical practices that take place at the Language Institute of a university based on the observation of classes, questionnaires and interviews of teachers and students. In order to achieve the purpose of the project, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach and also combined an ethnographic perspective which denotes a constant reflection on the part of the teachers who participated as objects of the study. The results of the study demonstrate that most of the teachers employ the PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) model to language teaching and that the students make use of direct and indirect strategies in order to help themselves learning.

Key words: Pedagogical practice, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical action, reflection.

Resumen

Este estudio pretende describir las prácticas pedagógicas que tienen lugar en el Instituto de Lenguas de dicha universidad, basándose en la observación de las clases, cuestionarios y entrevistas. Para lograr este objetivo, las investigadoras adoptaron un enfoque cualitativo con una perspectiva etnográfica que denota una reflexión constante por parte de los profesores que participaron como objeto de estudio. Los resultados demuestran que la mayoría de los profesores allí emplean el método de las tres Ps (Presentación, Práctica y Producción) y que los estudiantes usan estrategias directas e indirectas para ayudar en su aprendizaje.

Palabras claves: Práctica pedagógica, conocimiento pedagógico, acción pedagógica, reflexión.

Some basic concepts

This section briefly clarifies some concepts that are the key for a better understanding of the pedagogical practice of some teachers at a Language Institute of a private university in Ibagué. These concepts are pedagogical practice, pedagogical knowledge, reflection *in* action, reflection *on* action, pedagogical action, theory of learning and theory of language.

The pedagogical practice is a gradual process that validates the construction of didactics and the incorporation of science and technology in the educational environment. For this reason, pedagogy is an essential part of the teaching profession since it gives the teachers the opportunity to innovate and refresh their practice. In this article, pedagogical practice alludes to the representations that teachers have about their pedagogical and educational work and the ways they reveal them in class. (Patiño, L. 2006).

The pedagogical practice implies intention, knowledge, and comprehension. These three elements give it meaning. However, for the pedagogical practice to become more significant, it is also necessary for the teachers to reflect upon their performance. Carr (1993) suggests that this reflection should not be reduced to whether the teachers are applying theoretical issues on their practice or not. Reflection should rather be a step from routine and unconsciousness to meditation. From what teachers perform in their everyday professional practice to an ongoing self-awareness process of the ways in which they act.

According to (Shön, 1983), it is necessary to tell the difference between reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action. Shön contends that each individual's knowledge, is mainly tacit and implied in the ways in which teachers, act in the classroom, such that "our knowledge is *in* our action".(Shön, 1983 p.49). Reflection *on* action implies a more thoughtful process, in which, the reflective practitioner makes this tacit or implicit knowledge explicit, by constantly generating questions and checking emerging theories with both personal past experience and with the reflection of others.

Reflection *in* action as well as *on* action are both considered in this article. Both terms constitute an important issue when analysing pedagogical practices since they permit to confront teachers' beliefs with teacher's acts. Furthermore, reflection *on* action usually follows reflection *in* action since the former enables teachers to spend time exploring why they acted as they did, what was happening in a group and so on. In doing so, they develop sets of questions and ideas about their activities and practice.

On a more general view, reflection implies diagnosing and interpreting educational reality. (Schön, 1983 p.15). Reflection points the description, interpretation and the search for connections based on meaningful events, in order to reach a deeper knowledge that unfolds the structures of the pedagogical action. Pedagogical action refers to procedures, strategies and actions employed by the teacher. These procedures, strategies and actions are likely to be interpreted and analyzed and constitute a source of paramount importance for reflection (Schön, 1983).

Teaching is a social practice in which people's behaviour depends on their beliefs. For that reason, the teachers' opinion about their role is essential in order to define their intentions and objectives for their professional performance. In teaching, the discrepancy, where it exists, between teachers' beliefs and the way they act is a large one, then learners are likely to receive confused and confusing messages. As great part of being a teacher is developed through action. (Patiño, 2006 p.29) Nevertheless, teaching without reflection is blindfolded because without reflection there is no explanation, values, and attitudes generated by teaching.

Pedagogical practices require a more permanent analysis. This analysis can be carried out through basic categories such as knowledge, ways of doing, ethics and purpose issues. According to Gimeno (1983), these categories are basic for the construction of the teaching practice. Gimeno also declares that it is essential to orient teaching in a meaningful way by giving people a fundamental role as social agents. Social agents who express their pedagogical knowledge through their action in the classroom. Pedagogical knowledge makes reference to a dimension of the teaching practice in which theory, action and reflection interweave (Patiño, 2002). This is the reason why, systematic class observation is a chance to really understand teachers' beliefs about their job. Class observation allows the description, analysis and interpretation of the class events (Patiño, 2006 p.29). This activity brings benefits such as the construction of teachers' self-image and their perception as someone who knows and from whom the others learn. Someone who knows and who also learns from their pupils, colleagues and superiors and- of course- from their own experience. Someone whose underground knowledge affects what he does in classes due to the fact that the theories of language and learning, teachers' life experience and their personal beliefs, influence the pedagogical practices of the English teachers. As it is impossible to make generalizations about teachers'

experiences and beliefs it is important to consider, three theoretical views in the theory of language within the field of English Language Teaching.

According to Carlos Rico (2005), the first and the most traditional one is the structural view, which consists of viewing the language as a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The second view of language is the functional one. Here language is divided into categories of meaning and function and this view emphasizes the semantic and communicative dimension of language rather than its grammatical characteristics. The functional or communicative definition of language "had a significant impact on the development of Communicative Language Teaching" (Richards and Rodgers, 2005 p.154). The last view, t of language the so-called interactional, conceives language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social interactions between individuals. Language is the means to the creation and maintenance of social relations. As stated by Rico (2005), these three modes of language "provide the axioms and theoretical framework that may motivate a particular teaching method". (p.100).

The theory of learning implies cognitive and psycholinguistic processes involved in language learning and the conditions to activate these processes. There are theories based on procedures, such as habit formation, induction, inference, hypothesis testing, and generalization, and there are theories which emphasize the nature of the human and physical context in which language learning takes place. (Rico, 2005 p.100).

If teachers are to be effective in whatever approach they decide to take, it seems reasonably to expect them to act in accordance with their beliefs. Unfortunately, some theorists (Argyris and Shön, 1974, 1978) argue that this hardly ever occurs. Other studies have gone beyond this discrepancy to discover the junction not only between teachers' beliefs and actions, but also beliefs, actions and the context in which the educators work. One of these studies is the one conducted by La Universidad del Valle which is described next.

La Universidad del Valle (University of Valle) carried out a study in 2001 in order to identify the pedagogical practices of college teachers of the Accounting Program. The purpose of the study was to find out the articulation among university, professors, students and knowledge.

The private university where this study took place followed a similar procedure with a similar purpose. The population was made up with professors

from different programs such as Architecture, Industrial Engineering, Accounting, Psychology and the Language Institute. The goal was to characterize the pedagogical practices of each program. Nevertheless, this article only includes the results related to English teachers.

In this study the researchers observed classes and interviewed teachers and students at a Language Institute. This process permitted them to draw some conclusions about the pedagogical practices in this place. The researchers carried out this project during one academic semester.

This document describes the process and results of the study. The text contains four parts organized in the following way: Methodology, which includes the type of research, research setting, participants, procedures and instruments. Next, there is a description of the findings, and finally, a list of conclusions and recommendations that can be useful for the Language Institute.

Methodology

This study adhered to a qualitative approach to research. According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989) "qualitative and descriptive research are concerned with providing descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally, without the intervention of an experiment or an artificially contrived treatment" (p.90).

The study also combined an ethnographic perspective which denotes a constant reflection on the part of the investigators related to the grounded approach. Two features characterize the ethnographic approach implicit. The first one has to do with the blending of observational an interview methods employed, and the second one is the fact that the teachers who were observed reflected upon their practice.

The researchers described and analysed some events of the English classes at the Extension courses of a Language Institute of a private university in Ibagué, Tolima, Colombia. They took the role of non-participant-observers

The EFL Program at this Institute consists of 8 levels of English divided into periods of 40 hours each distributed over 5 hours per week. The syllabus is based on a textbook which follows a structural model. There is a Resource Centre provided with computers connected to Internet, an open collection of books, videos, cassettes, CDs and Direct TV.

The participants volunteered to take part of the project and they signed a consent form. 10 teachers and 20 students participated in the investigation.

The teachers were informed in a meeting about the project, and the students were invited by the researchers who visited different classes explaining the purpose of the project and the method. These students and teachers constitute a bounded system (Smith, 1978). In order to carry out the study the researchers employed three basic instruments: questionnaires, interviews and field notes. There were two questionnaires, one for the teachers and another for the students. The questionnaires permitted to collect information about the methodology, activities and the resources employed by the teachers in class. The field notes gave an account of what really went on in class concerning knowledge, the teacher and the student. The investigators observed a total of 10 classes during two weeks and a half.

Finally, with the interviews the researchers sought to find information they could not grasp from the previous instruments. The data was compiled from September to October and the analysis of data from November to December, 2006. The following part incorporates the data analysis and results.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data benefited from a grounded approach. In this approach, theory is grounded in the data and emerges from them (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). Qualitative studies rely on qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations and documents (Merriam, 1988). In fact, to collect data from different sources supports the validity of the findings obtained from qualitative data. Equally the investigators use multiple methods of data collection to confirm the emerging findings. This is known as triangulation. In triangulation, one method strengthens the other.

The researchers of the study being described, validated their findings by taking samples from different sources: questionnaires, interviews and observations. Each instrument helped the teacher researchers to contrast the information with the other sources. Next, there is a description of the results attained from the process described above.

Three Naughty Ps

It is evident from class observation, that most of the teachers use the PPP model. (5 out of 10). PPP stands for Presentation, Practice and Production. In PPP classes, the teacher presents the context and situation for the language and both explains and demonstrates the meaning and form of the new language.

The students then practice making sentences with the new language being learnt before going on to the production stage. In the production stage they talk more freely about themselves or other people in the real world. If we examine this model we can see that beneath, it lies the structural model since it is based on the practice of a language structure whose complexity increases according to the level.

The adoption of the model is enhanced by the interrelation of the parts laid in the textbook. The textbook is organized as follows: grammar, vocabulary, everyday English, reading, writing, listening and speaking. The structural method views language as "a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The level of proficiency is seen according to the student's capacity to recognize and master the elements of the system" (Rico, 2005 p.99)

The role of the materials, learners and teacher in one of the classes watched might show that the educator in charge of this class made use of the communicative model. To illustrate this, there are three features of this model captured in the teacher's class. First, the use of the target language all the time maximizing students' opportunity to be in contact with English: "If students get enough exposure to language and opportunities for its use and if they are motivated, then language learning will take care of itself" (Harmer, 1998 p.32). For this teacher, speaking English is one of her main strategies "for students to learn better the foreign language" (Interview teacher 5). Second, the teacher's class activities included tasks such as comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences; discovering missing features in a map or pictures among others. Third, the role assumed by the teacher was the one of "organizer of resources and as a resource herself...as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities" (Richards and Rodgers, 2005 p.167).

In brief, the English program at the Language Institute where this study was conducted is determined by the text book which follows a structural model. This is why, in most of the classes, the teachers demonstrate the use of the language, give feedback and lead the learning process. The majority of the teachers' practice relies on the PPP model. Only one of the teachers used the Communicative model as part of her job. Notwithstanding, for teachers, group work and pair work, as well as revision are key elements of their pedagogical practice, since they consider that students help each other in different ways. This pedagogical practice is best described in what comes up next.

One for All and All for One

Some of the teachers at the Language Institute use cooperative work as a tool to help students in their learning process (3 out of 10). By doing so, the teachers seek that the most capable peers help the ones who have some difficulties with the foreign language. They also arrange activities such as games and competitions in which students are involved in group work.

According to the cooperative learning principles, the strong students help the weak ones, since "cooperative learning teams are deliberately heterogeneous and consist of two or four members...there is a high achiever, one or two average achievers and a low achiever. The groups are chosen by the teacher after careful consideration. The teams are responsible for learning the tasks together, helping each other." (Kohonen,1992 p.35). This help goes beyond linguistic aspects as declared by one teacher when asked for the reason why she implemented group work in her classes:

> "I: Why do you use work and pair work in class? T[1]: Because it is one of the ways (If not the only one, to make the "weak" (between inverted commas) understand that they can do better, that they can reach the same level as the more advanced ones. In this group there are a lot of introverted and extroverted girls. So, I like to mix the extroverted and the introverted to see if the former gain any profit. Besides, the advantage of this group is that they love each other and they care for each other and that is a very important feature of the group"
>
> (Interview teacher 5)

When the teacher mentioned that she mixed "weak learners" with "strong ones" it is easy to infer that she meant that there is a twofold benefit for the ones involved in a group like this. On one hand, the social interaction between the "weak" and the "strong", enhances learning development, on the other hand the collaboration implicit makes the "weak" able to solve more complex tasks for him or her. The two former principles make up the central tenets of Sociocultural Learning. The teachers' quote: "There are a lot of introverted and extroverted girls. So, I like to mix the extroverted and the introverted to see if the former gain any profit" brings up one of the aspects of cooperative learning as "cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals. Within cooperative situations,individuals seek outcomes beneficial to themselves and all other group members" (Johnson et al., 1994 p.4). Cooperative learning provides "opportunities for students to act as resources for each other, thus assuming a more active role in their learning" (Richard and Rodgers, 2005 p.195).

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1 T: Teacher I: Interviewer

Reviewing is another strategy applied by the Language Institute teachers for the learning process. One of the teachers affirmed:

> "I look for activities that let students reinforce the topic we are studying. For example, in level 2 we are learning *"there is, there are"*, that was a topic contained in the book, recommended by the book and it was reinforcing that topic" (Interview teacher 1).

This educator used different ways to recapitulate what has been taught: Games, pair work and group work. Games are usually used because it is thought that a relaxed atmosphere is the best way to pick up knowledge. The use of pair work and group work reflects the influence of cooperative learning. "In cooperative learning situations learners work together to accomplish common goals...they are motivated to work together for mutual benefit in order to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Kohonen, 1992 pp.33-34).

The English syllabus is based on a textbook at the Language Institute. This textbook regulates the teaching and learning processes. The methodology of the book corresponds to a structural model emphasizing on the formal aspects of language. The formal aspects of language connote: grammar, vocabulary, morphology and syntax. Some teachers follow the textbook religiously as declared by one of them:

> "Well, let's see...one tries to follow the books. I suppose the books have had...a previous study...an analysis of the right sequence, one can not miss a topic from the book because it would not be good" (Interview, teacher 4).

Due to the fact that these teachers limit their class to complete the activities contained in the book, their classes do not show any example of pair or group work.

In conclusion, the teachers employ cooperative learning to create an atmosphere in which team work structures a positive interdependence and individual accountability among learners, with each participant contributing to the team product and the team being in charge of helping its teammates to learn. Team activities sometimes take the form of games and competitions. These games and competitions also based in cooperative principles conceive a relaxed learning environment which benefits students. Teachers use games as one of the ways to review the topics in order to help students assimilate knowledge better. However, there are also constraints like the structural syllabus of the textbook which in some cases is followed devotedly by some teachers. Those teachers reduce their classes to individual activities based on

the textbook. These teachers seem to forget that learning is a social process, and that one of the profits of team work is that students become one for all and all for one.

This first part contained the findings related to the teachers, of the Language Institute. Here, it was described the methodology they employ and how they orientate their teaching. Next, there is a depiction of the findings regarding the students, what motivates them and what they do in order to learn the foreign language.

Strategy Makes the Master

There are variations in learning styles that differ across individuals, and in strategies employed by individuals. Style is a term that refers to "consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual", that "pertain to you as an individual and that differentiate you from someone else" (Brown, 2000 p.113). Strategies are "specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information" (Brown, 2000 p.113). The English students of the Language Institute handle some learning strategies in order to achieve progress in the foreign language.

Due to the fact that the classes are mainly teacher-centred, it was very difficult to presume from observations the strategies the apprentices employ to learn. However, by analysing the interviews it could be deduced that they make use of the social indirect strategy: cooperating with others. According to Oxford (1990), there are two major language strategies commonly used by language students, direct and indirect (p.14). "Indirect strategies provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy, and other means" (p.135). An example of utilizing indirect strategies is to work together with a more proficient user of the new language in order to improve and acquire knowledge. The following excerpt illustrates the effort to work together with other learners on an activity with a common goal or reward:

> "I try to speak with a friend, talk to him in English; I send my wife messages in English and she corrects them"
> (Interview student 5)

The learners exploit the direct strategies, as well. These strategies "require mental processing of the language" (Oxford, 1990 p.37). One of the most

common direct strategy is repetition "saying or doing something over and over: listening to something several times; rehearsing; imitating a native speaker" (Oxford, 1990 p.45). This fragment shows the students' use of this strategy by rehearsing writing in her free time:

> "For instance, I bought the CD and the book and I keep on listening, I keep on reading books and I practice writing in my free time, I write what we have learned and have a look at my notes again to check if what I have written is OK. Speaking is a difficult skill for me. So, I try to pay attention to what the book brings in order to repeat its contents."
> (Interview, student 6).

Most of the learners stated that they were interested in learning English. Their interest comes from two different sources: The first one is the increasing demand of the globalised world for people who are able to speak a foreign language and the second one derives from the university requirements as the students need a certification in a foreign language in order to graduate.

In simpler terms, it can be deduced from the students' responses that their motivation has an "instrumental" outlook, which reflects "the practical value and advantages of learning a new language" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972 p.132). The students make use of direct and indirect strategies to enhance learning. The most common indirect strategy among them is cooperating, that is, working with a more capable peer. In the same way, repetition is the most popular direct strategy. Through repetition the students train themselves by saying over and over what they have been learning. These strategies aid learning, storage, retrieval and use of the foreign language. In this way, students help themselves mastering the language.

Conclusions

Based on all the observations carried out during the study the following picture emerges. The Language Institute seems to lack a clear methodology model for teachers. Most of the teachers use the PPP model, some of them utilize cooperative learning and others a communicative approach. Some just reduce their work to complete the activities contained in the textbook.

Students have a high regard for the teachers and the Institute. Nonetheless, they find some weaknesses in some of the processes, especially the ones who have the resources available. The aspects mentioned related to the teachers and students will be considered in turn in the next section.

Teachers

The teachers at the Institute do not seem to follow a particular methodology. Most of them follow a PPP approach, some reduce their teaching to complete the textbook activities, and others develop their classes according to a communicative model.

In the PPP at the Institute, the teacher presents the context and situation for the language, explains and demonstrates the meaning and then form of the new language. The students then practice making sentences with the new language being learnt and finally, they are enrolled in activities aimed to enhance production. The popularity of this approach can be due to the fact that the teachers are sponsored by another institution whose methodology bases on PPP. The textbook layout also boosts this approach.

Some teachers were observed to follow the text religiously. The textbook adopted by the Institute contains a structural syllabus. Therefore, it could be said that the teachers who simplify their teaching practice to fulfil the activities the textbook brings, employ a structural view to teaching English. These teachers also arrange their classes for students to work individually. This practice makes their classes meaningless because the foreign language is seen as an object to be learnt not as means of communication. The role of these teachers become the learner trainer who loads the students with tasks that come to be merely curricular activities that learners perform because the teachers tell them to do and which in the long-term might result discouraging.

In contrast, the teachers who adopt the communicative model and cooperative learning seem to realize that pair work and group work are key elements to reach a better practice of the foreign language. They devise activities in which communication is a means to an end. Students make descriptions of people or places, find differences in pictures, talk about themselves and other people, and participate in discussions. Interaction has an important role in communication, for this reason, teachers also design activities such as dialogues, conversations and simulations of real life activities namely, going to the doctor's or buying plane tickets at a travel agency.

In this way, the language becomes the tool for learning and the main source for feedback. These teachers also take into account review as an important element for the students to learn, especially those aspects concerned with grammar. The grammar issues they check or review are the ones they notice as

students' weaknesses. The teachers identify these weaknesses during students talking time and also from the results of the exams.

Although in the questionnaire some of the educators expressed that they carried a diary or journal, there was no evidence of the existence of such an item. Nevertheless, some of the teachers did carry with them a notebook in which they prepare their classes. This preparation was evident during class observation. Sometimes the notebook raises reflection *in* action as shown by one of the teachers who reflected on the phenomenon before her, and on the prior understandings which have been implicated in her behaviour in class. This can be seen in the following quotation:

> "I usually try to picture the class in my mind. I picture the class and I check my notebook and say "yes I have taught this topic before and I know this activity worked and this activity did not work. So I adapt the activity by adding and taking away some items, according to the group that I have been assigned"
> (Interview teacher 5)

Previously, we mentioned that this teacher's quote might give the evidence that the she reflected on the phenomenon before her. "The phenomenon before her" refers to the fact that she is facing a new group. The teacher is aware of the fact that she has already designed activities for a similar group (probably with the same level) and that these activities although earlier applied successfully, need to be adapted for the new situation.

In general, most of the teachers speak English during class time. They believe students should be exposed to the language since they live in an environment in which English is neither spoken, nor needed as the main means of communication. Therefore, learners rarely have opportunities to exercise the language.

It is important to enumerate other issues gathered from the questionnaires. Teachers prepare their classes in advance, design activities in order to develop the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) and use different kind of resources in class like posters, videos, and handouts.

Finally, they evaluate the students' performance through standard tests elaborated by a group of teachers. The apprentices receive feedback on their grades but there is no feedback beyond that, mainly due to time constraints. Teachers usually prepare review activities before the tests in order to help students with the possible problems they might have with language.

An important issue stated by the teacher is time constraints. They have to cover every single issue contained in the book in 40 hours. For them, this affects the way they prepare their classes. It also modifies their expected outcomes from the students. For instance, there is no time to develop more activities to foster speaking and writing. For that reason, according to these teachers the students get more training in the formal aspects of the language rather than on the communicative ones.

Students

During observations, the apprentices showed attentiveness in the class, they helped each other, they were always viewed to be involved in their respective work, thereby indicating that this discipline may be a possible example of their interest in the topic.

Their motivation is instrumentally oriented and they make use of different learning strategies the most popular being cooperating, that is, working with a more capable peer and repetition, through which students train themselves by rehearsing or reading over and over what has been taught to them. Cooperating is an indirect strategy and repetition is a direct one.

The information obtained from the questionnaires and interviews also showed the results that are illustrated next. It could be said that the 80% of the learners perceive their teachers as credible. This is deduced from the students' descriptions of them as "competent", "sociable", "sensitive" and "relaxed". They also expressed that the teachers always prepare their classes. This perception might also demonstrate the positive impact of the teachers on the students' perceptions of the Institute.

40% of the students affirmed that the teachers always use different resources to support their classes. In fact, some of them design handouts; bring videos, realia, pictures, photographs and readers to class. However, a low percentage (5.5%) consider that the teachers make activities to enhance the development of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). This contradicts what the teacher answered in this respect.

Students also mentioned the fact that the teachers let them know the purpose of their activities as well as the topics to be learnt, and give feedback after the tests.

Despite of the positive pedagogical traits registered above, the students indicated some weaknesses of the Institute identified in the questionnaires. These weaknesses are listed below:

- The need to improve the process of teacher evaluation

- The low promotion of autonomy

- The scarce use of TIC's and the Resource Centre on the part of the teachers and themselves

- Their lack of time to take advantage of the tutorials offered by the Institute as support for their learning.

Finally, it is important to highlight that even though teachers speak English all the time they do not check the efficiency of this procedure. This could be seen when only 5% of the students responded that the teachers always employed different ways to make themselves explicit when using the foreign language. These different ways were exemplified by asking the apprentices if the teachers mimed, drew or explained the meaning of unknown words.

The finding described above might show that sometimes the students would leave the classroom without any comprehension of the topics or purposes developed in class.

The last part of this article contains some recommendations that can be useful for the particular context in which this study took place as well as for language institutes in general.

Recommendations

Even though this article does not aim to be prescriptive, this part includes some considerations that can be taken into account by the Language Institute in which this study began. These reflections can also fit in with other language institutes.

In order to achieve communicative competence, it is necessary to develop the ability to manage the knowledge in which that communicative event takes place. The set of specific knowledge components that are utilized in communication via language is what Bachman (1990) has designated language competence. However, it is also necessary to be able to implement and execute that knowledge in an appropriate contextualized communicative language use. This is what he calls strategic competence. Language competence and strategic competence are components of communicative language competence.

At the Language Institute where this study took place, teachers focused their attention mainly on language competence. Furthermore, the Institute lacks

a clear communicative model in which students not only learn the language in context, but also take an active part in their learning process. For this reason, it would be convenient for the directive staff to work together with the teachers in order to define a method. They also need to adopt appropriate materials for the method they approve. They need to state exactly the role of the teachers and learners within this method. By doing so, they will make learners and educators active subjects of the process of learning and teaching. When adopting the method, they should take into account that learning a language goes beyond picking up its linguistic structure.

Learning a foreign language does not depend on the teachers' ability only. It is also students' responsibility to contribute to their own learning. It is very important for institutions to give students a more active role in their learning process by providing the opportunities, technology and resources. It is necessary to promote pedagogical models that reduce teachers at the front and generate students' participation, interaction and autonomy.

Another basic element to be taken into account is feedback. Students need to monitor their own learning and this monitoring can come from the teacher, their peers and the students themselves. Self-monitoring makes the students more aware of their role in the learning process and enhance confidence as well as a different view of evaluation.

A final recommendation is the need to apply a systematic process of evaluation to the teachers and administrative staff, and all the processes carried out at the Institute, since evaluation shows "where to improve future teaching and learning practices"...and is the "basis for rational decisions about future educational practices" (Quintero, 2003 p.130).

Further Research

On one hand, the outcomes of this research permitted the teachers visualize their pedagogical practices from an outer perspective. This outer perspective corresponds to what the investigators could deduce and notice from class observation. On the other hand, this study let the researchers know about activities carried out by the students outside the classroom in order to improve their English. They could also make a picture of the main strengths and weaknesses of the Institute as listed by the students in the questionnaires.

From these findings the researchers agree that this investigation can be continued on two different alternatives. The first one, could be by going back

to the English classrooms to observe the pedagogical practices of the teachers involved in this project and find out if there has been any transformation or advance. The second one could be to explore the extent to which the learners use English outside the classroom and their perceptions of the importance of out-of-class use of English to their learning.

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