

UNIVERSIDAD DON BOSCO
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS Y HUMANIDADES



PROYECTO DEGRADUACIÓN:
ASSESSING SPEAKING UNDER THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN EFL
CLASSES: A CURRICULAR DESIGN FOR TEACHERS TRAINING

PARA OPTAR POR EL GRADO DE:
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COMPETENCIAS

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Abstract

This project has as objective the curricular design of a course for professors for assessing speaking skills of learners under the competency-based approach. This project was thought as a solution to a problem that was identified while observing English classes as a part of a previous research conducted in a higher education institution. It was observed that the methodology used to conduct the classes and assess students was not congruent with the approach adopted by the institution and that oral skills were not promoted in class.

The research to identify the institution's needs was conducted following the qualitative approach. The data was collected by interviewing 2 Basic English instructors, and the Head of the English Department. Also, surveys were conducted among 22 professors from the language department as well as class observations and documental observation of the Syllabus, and the evaluation system set by the teaching staff. The data was analyzed through triangulation technique. Once the results were obtained, the teacher training needs for staff were identified.

The solution proposal consists of a course aiming to help professors to design lessons that integrate the competency-based approach and to create assessment tools that provide students to improve oral skills. It is expected that professors promote the development of speaking competencies in classes, so that students have more opportunities to polish their pronunciation, fluency and accuracy while using the language. In addition, it is expected that professors use assessment tools aligned with the competencies promoted in class and that those tools benefit students by helping them to identify their weaknesses in L2 production.

The curricular design of the course starts by presenting the exit profile, the general competency, and the achievement indicators. Then, the organization of the modules is presented, and it includes the learning evidence with their assessment criteria. The course is designed to be delivered in 8 weeks, and each week participants will receive 3 hours of instruction, making a total of 24 hours of training.

It is expected that the course will help professors to create learning experiences oriented to developing speaking skills on learners, student assessment and meaningful feedback.

Overview of the report

This work has been structured in five different chapters. The first one is the introduction, and this section describes the background of the problem, a summary of previous research conducted on this matter, and a brief description of the proposal to solve the problem. The second chapter presents the description of the problem, as well as the objectives of the proposal. Additionally, it synthesizes how the proposal would solve the described needs, and it presents the impact of the proposal on the institution. The third chapter includes a description of the methodology used to collect the data that established the basis for the solution proposal. In this chapter, the scope and coverage of the project is described in terms of beneficiary population and the methodology used to collect the data to underpin the proposal. The fourth chapter presents the complete proposal including the exit profile, the curriculum design of the program. Finally, the fifth chapter includes the conclusions and recommendations which describe the most important findings and the recommendations to implement the proposal in the future.

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Teaching and assessment of English as a foreign or second language should not be considered as separate activities, but as a whole process. In previous research conducted in a private university, of San Salvador, which will be addressed as University X to protect the privacy of the institution, it was identified that teaching and assessment methods were not congruent with the competencies that had been established in the course syllabus, and that classroom instruction was opposite to what Khasawneh (2021) established as desirable practices to develop students' oral skills such as student-centered classes, practice time and meaningful feedback. Some of the practices that were observed in this research showed that professors used methodologies and techniques from the

Grammar Translation Method, Audio Lingual Method, and Direct Method. In addition, the observed classroom practices followed similar patterns to that of lectures, grammar explanations and passive learning. Additionally, professors showed a predominant usage of the mother language to provide instructions, explanation of grammar rules, and vocabulary practice.

During observation, it was noticed that exercises are mostly oriented to provide practice on receptive skills: listening and reading. In most of the classes, students completed worksheets based on cloze exercises, and they were also asked to complete conversations and puzzles. Some reading aloud exercises and listening to audios to check pronunciation of words were also observed in the classes. Also, students were instructed to translate from English into Spanish. In this regard, even though the techniques from the Audio Lingual and Direct Method promote language acquisition, they were not complemented by other techniques that would encourage productive communicative skills.

Regarding assessment, it was observed that the evaluation system relies on five written tests across the semester. Most tests were grammar oriented with little or no tasks to assess speaking skills. In fact, the tests were designed to assess grammar, listening, and reading. There were also multiple-choice, matching, and open-ended questions. In summary, the type of assessment practiced by faculty shows little evidence in promoting speaking skills and meaningful situations for learning.

Based on the findings of the research, it became evident that there was no connection between the communicative competencies appointed in the course syllabus, methodology and oral assessment. In consequence, there is an evident need to train the faculty on designing lessons aimed at providing practice to stimulate communicative competencies, as it is appointed in the syllabus. There is also an opportunity to train staff on communicative assessment tools using the

Competency-Based approach that may facilitate assessment practices based on individual performance of students.

To solve the problem of assessing students' oral proficiency effectively, we propose to design a professional development course for English professors on assessment of speaking skills under the competency-based approach to guarantee the congruence between the established competencies in the course syllabus and the evaluation system. Such training may encourage professors to modify their teaching and assessment practices. The proposed professional development course will address teaching and assessment methodologies of oral skills seen as integrated activities rather than isolated. Such strategies could be applied to English classes at all levels.

The Understanding by Design (UbD) methodology will be contemplated in the course since it has shown benefits in overall results of the teaching-learning process (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). The UbD method consist of “reverse planning” in which professors decide and design the assessment activities and assessment tools prior to planning a class, therefore all the activities planned in the lesson will aim at building competencies that are pertinent to achieving the goals for which the assessment activities are intended (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). In that way, teaching and assessment will be integrated and oriented to help students accomplish a higher level of language domain by the guidance, correction, and meaningful feedback from their professors.

Designing a training that addresses a specific problem requires some research to present a product that will benefit the participants. Therefore, in this document we include a summary describing the research that supports our curricular proposal. The first chapter includes the introduction to the problem being explored. Then, the second chapter introduces the project. The third chapter comprises the theoretical basis of the project through a literature review on the

subject. Next, we describe the methodology to collect data in chapter 4. Finally, we present the proposal to solve the problem of assessing students' oral competence under the competency-based approach as well as the conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 Literature Review

This section presents a review of the literature on the competency-based approach, and how it has been integrated into language teaching. In addition, we explore the role of assessment, and the importance of aligning assessment with the principles of competency-based learning. Towards the end of this chapter, we introduce an overview of the teachers and learners' role to make a successful implementation of competency-based approach.

Competency-based Assessment

In every school and workplace, students and professionals are required to demonstrate what they are capable of doing. They are required to complete tasks and solve problems by the application of knowledge and skills. This can be observed in everyday life as well. For instance, to be granted a license or a job as a driver, the person needs to show the ability to drive a motor vehicle. We could not trust a driver who can only recite a manual on how to drive a car. Likewise, in the field of Languages, a person must demonstrate that he can communicate effectively in the target language to be considered competent. Thus, this section frames the results of research on the matter of competency-based teaching in TESOL classes.

A key aspect in developing language competency is designing the evaluation process. Evaluation should be aligned with the competencies in the course syllabus to help students grow as learners. As a matter of fact, many scholars agree that when assessment is applied under the competency-based approach, it can help students to have a critical view of their learning, to grow as people, to identify their needs and to recognize their strengths and areas of opportunity (Keppell

et al., 2007; Soriano, 2013; Tobón et al., 2010). In addition, Perrenoud (2004) emphasized the importance of selecting the right assessment to meet the goals established in the program as this will grant that the goals are met by students. This idea is continued by Saadi et al. (2016) who also mentioned that there should be a direct link between the curriculum goals, the teaching-learning process, and the evaluation system to ensure that significant decisions are made in benefit of the students, since curriculum designers make decisions and take action when they update programs after evaluating the outcome.

Congruence between assessment and teaching under the competency-based approach is an area that has scarcely been researched in El Salvador, this leads to few publications on this topic. Therefore, most of the data available comes from experiences and research in other countries. One unpublished thesis on the matter of congruence between assessment and teaching under the competency-based approach in El Salvador was conducted by Valladares (2020) in a private high-school. His study focuses on the evaluation of technical competences of students by using assessment tools such as: formative projects, portfolios, mental maps, discussion forums, study cases and written exams. Valladares (2020) also pointed out that educational institutions should verify that all the processes involved in the teaching-learning experiences are aligned to the competency-based approach to avoid the usage of traditional approaches that put emphasis on memorization of content. In fact, Valladares' research provided valuable insights on the application of the competency-based approach assessment and evaluation in El Salvador.

Much has been discussed about using formative assessment to benefit learning. This is supported by Soriano (2013) who mentioned that assessment under the competency-based approach should be formative oriented since formative assessment strengthens the outcome of the teaching-learning process (Luthfiyyah et al., 2021). In this regard, Soriano and Luthfiyyah et al.

emphasize the importance of using formative assessment due to its quality of providing learning evidence that informs students about their level of performance. If professors identify students' weaknesses early in the process of learning, they could advise students on how to improve their English.

Competency-based Language Teaching in English Classrooms

Competency-based language teaching (CBLT) could be a solution to ensure the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language, especially in the development of oral proficiency. However, CBLT success relies on premises such as the teacher's competency in designing strategies to develop sufficient oral skills practice, and learners and teachers' attitude towards ongoing constructive feedback. In this section, you will learn about how those elements have been implemented in different settings.

As mentioned above, an important element to consider when applying CBLT is the teacher's performance in the classroom, for he is the one that guides and corrects students with proper and timely feedback. Scholars Badder and Hamada (2005), and Saadi et al. (2016) developed studies on CBLT for teaching English. Both studies concluded that teachers played a key role in the classroom to implement competency-based assessment. As well, their study determined that the presence of feedback is crucial for developing speaking skills in English classrooms.

Students need to have enough talking time in the classroom to develop their oral skills. However, in practice students might not have enough time to use the language with their peers. For instance, a study made by Badder and Hamada's (2005) aimed to determine how CBLT is applied in the English classrooms. After analyzing recordings of the lessons and interviewing

students, they concluded that most of the teachers observed emphasized individual learning over collaborative learning. At the same time, Badder and Hamada (2005) remarked that teachers were the main participants in the class. The scholars observed, in their study, a need to reduce teacher talking time and increase students' opportunities to discuss actively in class. Both students talking time and collaborative learning are needed to improve students' oral competence in the target language.

When it comes to teachers and students' attitude towards feedback, there is an evident need to follow up the students' learning process, and to provide support for learners to acquire the language. In fact, there was a study conducted by Saadi et al. (2016) at Azad University, Iran, about the Teacher's attitude while applying CBLT, particularly in classroom management and assessment. The results indicated that there was no feedback from instructors on assignments. Additionally, there was a lack of language usage when teaching, some instructors use Persian as the medium of communication in the classroom. Therefore, teachers have the challenge to provide opportunities for meaning communication among learners.

Two important aspects have been discussed so far in the literature review. Firstly, the fact that scarce research has been conducted about the evaluation of students' oral competence. Secondly, there is evidence that the application of the competency-based approach has some weaknesses. However, proposals to improve the evaluation of oral competence in EFL teaching in Latin American were not found. Therefore, it has been concluded that there is a need to design a training program to help teachers and professors apply the principles of competency-based assessment to teach and evaluate students' oral competence in English.

1.3 Solution Proposal

To address the issue of incongruence between teaching and the assessment of oral skills in English lessons, we have elaborated a proposal for a training on competency-based assessment of oral skills. Such training addresses the basis and principles for competency-based assessment. In addition, the proposal includes strategies for developing formative assessment in the classroom and designing tasks under the competency-based approach to assess speaking skills. At the end of the training, professors will have a deeper insight and a clearer picture on how to apply the competency-based approach to boost and promote more meaningful learning experiences to develop oral proficiency.

2. Project Formulation

2.1 Introduction

Education in El Salvador has changed with the adoption of the competency-based approach in schools and higher education institutions, and as a result institutions have raised different demands on the quality of teaching, and professional profile of teachers (MINED, 2008). One of these demands is updating teachers' competencies on the principles of the competency-based approach. University X, which will benefit from this project, decided to adopt the competency-based approach in 2008 (Araujo et al., 2012). Loza and Marroquín (2011) conducted a research study in University X, which revealed that 87% of the professors in the language department felt that they needed further training to assess students applying the principles of the competency-based approach. The institution has offered different training, since then, oriented to help professors design and implement their lessons as well as on learning assessments using the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) approach. However, follow up has not been

offered to professors, after the training, to ensure that they have developed the competencies to apply the CBLT approach. Therefore, there is a real need to deepen teachers' knowledge about CBLT principles, lesson planning, and innovative methods for designing more meaningful teaching and assessment experiences.

This training proposal will not only benefit professors, who will improve their teaching practice and upgrade professionally, but also, it will benefit students, who will be assessed fairly and will learn to recognize their weaknesses and strengths in their learning. The training will also aid the institution with qualified professors who will teach under the competency-based approach. In this line of thought, the proposal of the project includes not only instructional sessions, but also reflective sessions and collaborative experiences for participants, as they learn to apply the principles of competency-based education.

2.2 Potential Impact and Contribution to Knowledge

This proposal is valuable in pedagogical terms since it will offer professors the opportunity to deepen their knowledge on the principles of the competency-based approach and on assessment strategies. By understanding the importance of the congruence between the competency-based approach and evaluation techniques used to assess oral competence, professors could strengthen their teaching practice and promote more student-centered activities. Moreover, professors will learn to plan their lessons differently by applying the "Understanding by Design method", so that they can create and carry out more significant assessment and evaluation tasks that will help students to achieve the expected goals more efficiently. Overall, English professors will be better prepared to assist and provide constructive feedback to students.

Although the competency-based approach is not new to professors in this institution, they have not had the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practice, with a mentor, since a

follow-up component had not been included in previous training. As mentioned earlier, in the study carried out before the development of this project, it was observed that professors did not apply the principles of the competency-based approach to assess students' oral competence. Moreover, data collection shows that professors usually apply traditional methodologies. Thus, follow-up and assistance during and after training are needed to make the training experience insightful and innovative. The experience of this training also seeks to be a transformative agent in the way professors learn and teach.

2.3 Social Significance of the Project

As society and people change, education must grow as it seeks to implement appropriate methodologies for teaching and assessing competencies that are demanded in today's world. The adoption of teaching practices, especially those regarding assessment is beneficial for students, professors, and the institution. In fact, professors will be better prepared to address today's students' needs. In addition, they will model more insightful classroom practices on student teachers in the English major, who could become English teachers. Moreover, the institution will enhance professors' performance which will result in forming more competent and qualified English major graduates.

2.4 Objectives of the Project

2.4.1 General Objective

To design a course for English professors on assessment of speaking skills under the competency-based approach to guarantee the congruence between the established competencies and the evaluation system.

2.4.2 Specific Objectives

- To inquire about the evaluation and teaching strategies that professors apply while assessing students' oral competence in English.
- To define the exit profile of participants after completing the course of assessing speaking under the competency-based approach in EFL classes.
- To design the syllabus of the course of assessing speaking under the competency-based approach in EFL classes.

2.5 Description of the Product

The course “Assessing Speaking under the Competency-Based Approach in EFL Classes” aims at achieving the congruence between the teaching methodology and the evaluation of the learning outcomes. The course will include 24 hours of instructions divided in 3-hour sessions, and the methodology to be used will be blended. This involves self-paced learning during the week and in- person discussion sessions on weekends to share ideas, as well as self and peer assessment to improve the quality of the learning evidence developed by the professors.

In the first module, professors will be instructed plan their lessons integrating the UbD framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and the Competency-Based approach. The purpose is to help professors to design learning experiences that are connected to assessment, and at the same time to encourage the development of oral proficiency in English on students. The second module will walk professors to design effective assessment tools that will emphasize the importance of constructive feedback using technology for the development of oral competence in students. To sum up, it is expected that the Understanding by Design framework helps professors to keep the congruence between the learning outcome, the learning experiences and assessment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Scope of the Project

This professional development course will be addressed to 34 English professors from University X. According to data provided by the Language Department administration, there are 724 English major students enrolled in the term 02-2021, who are currently taking basic, intermediate, and advanced English courses. These students will be benefited directly by a change in the assessment methodology used by their professors since their oral competence will be assessed more objectively, and it will allow professors to provide better feedback to them. In addition, professors will have more tools to motivate them to improve their oral communicative skills in the English language.

3.2 Previous Activities to Support the Proposal

3.2.1 Methodological Approach

This section includes a detailed description of the methodology used to conduct a research study that precedes the curricular proposal presented in this document. A qualitative approach was used to inquire on the research problem: *how related is the current evaluation system of oral communication competencies to the competency-based approach in basic English classes from an English major in a Salvadoran university*. According to Sampieri et al. (2014), when collecting data about a phenomenon, it is important to be immersed in the environment where the phenomenon takes place. Thus, observation of classes and interviews with professors were necessary to learn and understand more in- depth about the case studied.

3.2.2 Data Sources

Data sources for this research were various. First, we collected data from a group of 24 English professors, all of them currently working in different courses of the English major. This group included 13 male and 11 female professors whose ages range from 27 to over 50 years old. A second source of data were class documents such as the basic English syllabus within which the evaluation system was the focus. Finally, the observation of classes provided relevant and meaningful information about teaching methodology, assessment techniques and interaction among participants in the observed lessons.

3.2.3 Techniques and Instruments to Collect Data.

The data was collected by means of a survey, interviews, and documentary observations, which were validated by an expert in EFL. The purpose for collecting this data was to determine if the tasks assigned to students assessed their oral competence and to find out if the competency-based approach was included in the design of the tasks.

The participants were twenty-two professors who provided their input to the research by completing an online questionnaire (see Appendix 1), that included nine open-ended questions about the assessment practices in the classroom. The second tool included 4 open-ended questions, and the data was collected in two separate video-call interviews with two professors (see Appendix 2).

Further data was collected by means of documentary observations of the syllabus of a Basic English course. Two different instruments were designed to carry out documentary observation. The instruments were designed based on the Socioformative competency-based approach proposed by Tobón et al. (2010) and adapted to fit into EFL planning. The first instrument was an

observation sheet (see Appendix 3) to assess the syllabus of the Basic English I class, and the second instrument was another observation sheet (see Appendix 4) to assess the speaking tasks assigned to students.

A special focus was assigned to examine the evaluation system of each class (to verify if speaking tasks were included and to select the activities that would be observed), and the activity guides for speaking tasks. Then, this information was contrasted with the data gathered through the questionnaires and the interviews to increase the validity and consistency of the data collected (Benavides & Gómez-Restrepo, 2005).

3.2.4 Data Analysis

As the data collected was obtained from different sources and by means of different instruments, the data was processed using a triangulation technique. The interviews were transcribed and then coded to elaborate memos with the most relevant findings. In addition, the surveys were tabulated, and the results were represented in graphs. At the same time the information gathered by means of the observation checklists (classes, syllabus, and evaluation system) was organized in a double entry chart. At the end, all the data was compared to reach conclusions from the findings.

3.3 Decision Making from the Findings

Results obtained from the research provided insightful input for the design of the professional development course. Areas of improvement for assessing oral competency have been identified. It was observed from the syllabus that competencies were not well structured, and the document did not include assessment guidelines, criteria, nor assessment tools (See table 1.). Another important element that was absent was the description of the development of productive

skills. Such evidence made it possible to determine that professors did not have a clear evaluation path under the competency-based approach. Since the syllabus did not provide major details on how to carry out evaluation processes, professors seem to make spontaneous decisions on how to carry them out. Therefore, it might explain why some professors do not include oral assessment in the evaluation system (See table 2.).

The findings suggest that one of the aspects to be included in the proposal of the professional development course can be a review of the assessment principles of the competency-based approach. Other aspects that should be included in a training for professors could be methods, strategies, and techniques for teaching English; this with the purpose to strengthen and deepen professors' knowledge on integrating teaching and assessment. Such a training would provide professors a clearer vision on what students are expected to achieve.

Table 1.

Results from observation of the syllabus

Criteria	Comments
Assessment	<p>The syllabus did not include the learning evidence or guidelines for students.</p> <p>Criteria for assessment was not observed.</p> <p>There were not any assessment strategies or tools included in the syllabus.</p>

Table 2.*Speaking tasks observation*

Class # 1	Class #2
<p>Evaluation system for class #1 was requested, and we observed different activities, but only one of them was a speaking activity.</p> <p>The professor explained that she only carries out one speaking activity in each unit, which consists of providing a model conversation that students must modify and make it more original.</p> <p>There are no guidelines for this activity.</p> <p>There is not an assessment instrument to evaluate students' performance on this activity either.</p> <p>Criteria are unknown.</p>	<p>Evaluation system for class #2 does not include any speaking activity.</p> <p>Professor explained that the evaluation system for every unit is divided into 30% for the completion of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and grammar exercises which are part of the virtual book, 20% for attendance and 50% for the unit test which is also part of the virtual book. The unit test assesses grammar, vocabulary, and writing structures.</p>

The results from the professors interviewed allowed us to know their perceptions on what could be changed to improve the development and assessment of their lessons. One of the interviewed professors mentioned that it was urgent to evaluate English teachers' teaching sequences to determine whether they were truly committed to the development of students' communicative competence. This was mentioned because there is little to no follow-up from administrators to professor's lessons. In addition, another professor mentioned that it was necessary to shrink classes to provide more personalized assistance to students and improve feedback opportunities.

Professors also commented on the methodology they used to conduct classes. One instructor stated that teachers encourage oral production by developing activities such as: dialogues, role-plays and games. However, the methods observed in lessons did not encourage

oral production of the language, and it follows a mechanical approach of repetition (see table 3). It could be stated that the professors' practicum was not congruent with their answers on the type of methodology they used to conduct lessons.

Lastly, in the questionnaire, only a quarter of the professors mentioned that they used rubrics to assess students' oral competence. By not using rubrics, professors miss the opportunities to provide meaningful feedback to students. Moreover, it was evidenced through their answers in the questionnaire and the observation of the evaluation systems presented by each professor that oral tasks were not assigned in all evaluation units. The fact that professors are not assessing oral competence in all the evaluation units, and that they do not use formal tools to assess students' communicative skills suggest that they may benefit from a training on creating meaningful evaluation tasks for students to evidence their progress on oral skills. Additionally, learning to create rubrics may allow professors to provide better feedback to students. Hence, it has been decided to assist professors to improve the way in which they give feedback to their pupils.

Table 3.

Summary of teaching methods observed in English classes.

Elements to be observed in class	Incidents	Memos
EFL Methodology	Grammar translation method Audiolingual method Direct method	It was observed that even though the approach implemented by the institution is competency- based approach, the professors did not follow such approach because students did not present a product to evidence their learning of grammar structure, vocabulary, and functions of the language.

Elements to be observed in class	Incidents	Memos
Application of the competency-based approach	Teacher talking time.	<p>It was observed that professors used repetition drills which is a technique that belongs to the audiolingual method. Another aspect to point out was the presentation of new vocabulary which sometimes was translated into the mother tongue for clarity; such technique is part of the grammar translation method. There were no efforts to teach the new vocabulary inductively.</p> <p>Professors do not always use visual aids to introduce vocabulary.</p>
	Students did not show mastery of the competency at the end of the lesson.	Professors used most of the class time to explain grammar structures, and vocabulary.
	Interactive patterns: teacher-student	<p>Students did not use grammar structure in communicative activities, nor did they use the vocabulary presented during the lesson to demonstrate the development of the competency.</p> <p>Cooperative learning is not encouraged while working on class tasks. In the class observed, students worked individually.</p>
	Collaborative learning was not observed.	

A third technique used to collect data was the observations of class recordings, which provided the opportunity to see the development of EFL classes, and they evidenced that even though the competency-based approach is implemented by the institution, professors do not follow the approach in English classes (see table 3). However, in the data collected by means of the questionnaire, two participants remarked the importance of keeping the congruence between the learning objectives, and the teaching and assessment method.

3.4 Curricular Actions Taken to Develop the Project

In the next paragraphs, the curricular actions taken to develop the project will be described. The curriculum design process that we followed is the one proposed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005).

3.4.1 Basis for the Professional Development Course

The findings of the study, described thus far, evidenced the need to conduct a professional development course in which professors could review and get practical ideas on how to apply the competency-based approach to assess their students' oral skills. As it has been described in the methodology section, the most salient findings suggest that professors need to deepen their understanding of the competency-based approach to develop oral proficiency in EFL students by means of improving assessment techniques, and subsequently teaching methods. In addition, they need guidance and reflective time to self-assess their teaching practices. This is to ensure they apply the approach consciously and effectively to benefit students' performance.

3.4.2 Creating the Exit Profile

After determining the needs of University X, we decided to include in the professional development course an innovative method to plan lessons paying special attention to the

achievement of the learning outcomes, so that the learning and assessment activities are oriented towards the mastery of the goals in the syllabus. The application of “Understanding by Design” (UbD) or “Backward Planning” has reported benefits such as improvement of the methodological design of the units, clearer statements of learning outcomes and better selection of learning and assessment activities to achieve the goals stated in the syllabus (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016).

After identifying the need to create a professional development course on assessment of oral skills under the competency-based approach, it was determined what competencies the professors needed to master at the end of the course to improve their teaching practice.

4. Solution Proposal

Assessing Speaking under the Competency-Based Approach in EFL Classes

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Introduction

This section presents the solution proposal to the research problem of assessing students' oral proficiency effectively. The solution proposal consists of a course to help professors design lesson plans using the understanding by design approach (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The course is also oriented to design assessment tools to evaluate EFL students' oral competencies and to provide constructive feedback to students.

In the following pages, you will find the curriculum for the course “Assessing Speaking under the Competency-Based Approach in EFL Classes”, that includes the exit profile of participants, the competencies of the course, the achievement indicators, and the description of modules.

Course Specifications

Title of the course:	Assessment of oral skills under the competency-based approach in basic English classes.		
Course duration:	8 weeks	Total of hours	24 hours
Weekly hours:	3 hours	Class duration	50 minutes

Participants

This professional development course is addressed to English professors at UTEC.

Exit profile

Professors, who complete the course: “Assessing Speaking under the Competency-Based Approach in EFL Classes”, design English learning experiences that integrate teaching and assessment, using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework to emphasize the development of oral proficiency in English, and a culture of descriptive feedback in alignment with the target competencies in their institution's curriculum with particular attention to the development of oral skills.

In addition, it is expected that professors integrate ICT resources to plan and implement their lessons and to assess students' oral proficiency, as a reflection of their commitment with permanent innovation in education in collaboration with colleagues.

Course methodology

The course will be delivered following the principles of the competency-based approach and under a blended modality; a blended modality offers the advantage of using a virtual classroom for professors to work on tasks during the week in their free time, and to meet on weekends to discuss and enrich their learning experience. Therefore, the learning tasks will be synchronous and asynchronous with guidance of the facilitators as needed. In addition, teamwork and discussion will be encouraged to design assessment and learning tasks in the virtual sessions as well as in- person sessions.

General Competency

1. Plan lessons that integrate assessment with teaching with an emphasis on the development of speaking, using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators

1.1 Determines expected learning outcomes in agreement with the competencies established in the course syllabus, while emphasizing oral skills.

1.2 Designs assessment strategies and tools to provide constructive feedback to students on their oral performance with the use of technology.

1.3 Designs a learning sequence for the practice of macro skills with a main emphasis on the development of oral proficiency, while reflecting with peers about better teaching practices.

Course Syllabus

Module 1

Planning lessons by integrating the “UbD” methodology and the Competency-based approach.

Problem to be solved: Participants are familiarized with lesson planning and its different elements. However, some professors might not connect the expected competency in the course, to be facilitated, with the learning activities and assessment when planning their lessons. At the same time, it is possible that some professors do not plan specific strategies to provide feedback to students on their oral proficiency, being this an obstacle for the students to improve their speaking competency.

Competency: Plan lessons that integrate assessment with teaching with an emphasis on the development of speaking, using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators

1.1 Determines the expected learning outcome in agreement with the competencies established in the course syllabus while emphasizing oral skills.

1.2 Designs assessment strategies and tools to provide constructive feedback to students on their oral performance with the use of technology.

Description of the module: This module will allow participants to connect the competencies in the syllabus with competency-based strategies to teach and assess learning outcomes. Also in this module, participants will create strategies to provide students with feedback to boost their learning.

Module 1

Competency: 1. To plan lessons with emphasis on speaking to integrate assessment and teaching using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators	Evaluation	Learning Unit	Knowledge
1.1 To determine the expected learning outcome in agreement with the competencies established in the course syllabus while emphasizing oral skills.	<p>Learning evidence: Outline of important elements to consider before planning</p> <p>Description: The participants outline the relevant elements in the syllabus to be assessed and the competencies.</p> <p>Evaluation criteria: The general competency and the achievement indicators are identified correctly. The outline presenting the information is delivered following these standards: It includes a front page and development of the task. Font: Times New Roman 12. Line spacing: 2.0. Margins: 1 inch. Format: PDF.</p>	1. Boosting your students' learning through improving your planning.	<p>1.1 Identifying competencies to be developed by course, unit, and lesson</p> <p>1.2 Checking the syllabus and teaching resources included/available)</p> <p>1.3 Planning language lessons using the Understanding by Design framework</p>

Competency: 1. To plan lessons with emphasis on speaking to integrate assessment and teaching using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators	Evaluation	Learning Unit	Knowledge
1.2 To design assessment strategies and tools to provide constructive feedback to students on their oral performance with the use of technology.	<p>Learning outcome: An oral assessment guide. Description: The participants design an oral assessment in alignment with the competencies in the learning unit, along with the assessment tool.</p> <p>Evaluation Criteria: it must include the competency and description of the level of achievement. In addition, it must include detailed instructions for students.</p>	2. Designing assessment in alignment with the competencies for the development of oral skills.	<p>2.1 Assessing your students' oral performance.</p> <p>2.2 Designing feedback tools to guide students on their development of oral performance.</p> <p>2.3 Using technology as a means for providing feedback.</p>

Evaluation System

Unit	Achievement Indicator	Learning Evidence	Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Tool	%
1. Boosting your students' learning through	1.1 To determine the expected learning outcome in	Outline relevant elements in the syllabus.	-The general competency is identified correctly. -The	Rubric	25%

Unit	Achievement Indicator	Learning Evidence	Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Tool	%
improving your planning.	agreement with the competencies established in the course syllabus while emphasizing oral skills.		achievement indicators are identified correctly. -The outline is presented neatly.		
2. Designing assessment in alignment with the competencies for the development of oral skills.	1.2 To design assessment strategies and tools to provide constructive feedback to students on their oral performance with the use of technology.	Design an oral assessment guide.	-The assessment is aligned with the competency and the achievement indicator. - The assessment tool describes the criteria to evaluate students' oral performance. - The criteria in the assessment tool is suitable to evaluate the mastery of the achievement indicator.	Rubric	75%

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Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design*. (2nd ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Module 2**Encouraging oral production in your classes**

Problem to be solved: While participants have experienced planning lessons using different approaches, they might not be familiar with UbD which is a framework that encourages professors to think backwards by leading them to identify the competency that students will develop at the end of each lesson. Based on this expected outcome, professors will design learning activities that guide students towards the achievement of the expected competency.

Competency: Plan lessons that integrate assessment with teaching with an emphasis on the development of speaking, using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators

1.3 Designs a learning sequence for the development of the macro skills with a main emphasis on the development of oral proficiency while reflecting with peers about better teaching practices.

Module Description: The aim of this module is to lead participants to design TESOL lessons emphasizing speaking and integrating assessment by following UbD planning and the competency-based approach. The participants of the module design lesson plans and assessments to develop and evaluate students' oral proficiency while they collaborate with one another to enrich their lessons.

Module 2

Competency: 1. To plan lessons with emphasis on speaking to integrate assessment and teaching using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators	Evaluation	Learning Unit	Knowledge
1.3 To design a learning sequence for the development of the macro skills with a main emphasis on the development of oral proficiency while reflecting with peers about better teaching practices	<p>Learning evidence: lesson plan</p> <p>Description: The participants design a learning sequence to develop oral competency on EFL students applying the principles of UbD framework</p> <p>Evaluation Criteria: The lesson plan must include the competency.</p>	3. Planning lessons with emphasis on speaking skills.	3.1 Selecting learning strategies.

Competency: 1. To plan lessons with emphasis on speaking to integrate assessment and teaching using the UbD framework.

Achievement Indicators	Evaluation	Learning Unit	Knowledge
	The assessment must be aligned with the competency.		
	The learning activities must be coherent to achieve the competency.		
	Learning evidence: Self-evaluation tool	4. Reflecting on our teaching	4.1. Peer-assessing our lessons
	Description: The participants design a tool to self-assess and to peer-assess their lessons and to explore areas of improvement. Evaluation criteria: The self-evaluation tool must include criteria to assess all the different parts of the lesson.		4.2 Self- assessing our lessons.
	It must describe different levels of achievement.		
	It must include an area for comments or possible changes to the original lesson.		

Evaluation System

Unit	Achievement Indicator	Learning Evidence	Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Tool	%
3. Planning lessons with emphasis on speaking skills.	1.3 To design a learning sequence for the development of the macro skills with a main emphasis on the development of oral proficiency while reflecting with peers about better teaching practices	Designing a Learning sequence following the UbD framework and integrating the competency-based approach.	-Elements included in the learning sequence: Class generalities, Competency, Achievement Indicators, Assessment, Learning activities. -Congruence between the competency and assessment -Coherent learning activities towards achieving competency.	Rubric	75%
4. Reflecting on our teaching.		Self - assessment tool.	-Students are critics of their own work by applying the self-assessment tool.	Rubric	25%

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5. Conclusions

The institution that will receive the proposal in this project designed their curricula under the competency-based approach in 2008. Nonetheless, some areas of improvement in the implementation of this approach were observed while collecting data for this proposal. For instance, it was noticed that professors teaching Basic English 1 did not apply the competency-based approach to assess students' oral performance. At the same time, it was observed that professors used traditional assessments such as filling in the gaps and multiple-choice exercises. In addition, from the observations of classes, it was detected that students did not receive feedback on their oral performance. Therefore, it was concluded that neither the learning activities nor the assessments would help students to become proficient speakers of the target language.

Considering that learning and assessment are interrelated, it is important to provide professors with training to connect their teaching methodology with the outcomes expected in each class. Training on the competency-based approach has been offered before (Loza & Marroquín,

2011). However, training on how to connect the learning activities in class, learning evidence and competencies has not been conducted yet. Taking this into account, we decided to introduce professors into backward design to provide them with guidance to plan lessons congruent with their syllabus expected learning outcomes, to encourage oral production in class, and to provide constructive feedback to students on their oral performance.

Professors who will benefit from this training are valued by the institution due to their years of experience since 50% of them have been teaching for more than 20 years. After taking this course, professors will get different insights to improve their planning and to align the learning activities with the competencies of the course. Moreover, professors will design assessments to evaluate the students' mastery of the competencies. As a result, students will see the connection between the activities developed in classes and the assessments, and they will benefit from the feedback to improve their oral proficiency.

6. Recommendations

In the process of elaborating the proposal, three areas of improvement to implement the proposal have been identified. Therefore, we provide the following recommendations:

First, professors should be notified ahead of time about the implementation of the course, duration, and modality, so that they organize their time to participate in this training since most of the professors are hourly paid.

Second, the implementation of the competency-based approach requires a change in the way that assessment is conceived since assessment should be formative and be limited to its summative aspect. Despite being trained in the implementation of the competency-based approach, some professors have still not transferred the approach to their evaluation methodology. Therefore,

what is recommended is that the institution conduct observation of classes and learning sequences to aid professors who might have difficulties to use backward design and to create assessments that are aligned with the competency and achievement indicators of their courses.

Finally, it is recommended that the institution holds methodological meetings at the end of each term with faculty, so professors present, in these meetings, examples of the learning sequences and assessment they implemented as well as some benefits they have observed from designing with backwards planning framework and in the assessment of students.

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1

Assessment of Oral Competence in EFL Classes in Higher Education – Questionnaire 1

Objective: To analyze the congruence between the competency-based approach and the assessment of oral competences in English courses in higher education.

Instructions:

Dear professor, we hope you are doing well. As students on the master's degree in Curriculum Design, Pedagogy and Competency-based Assessment, we thank you for your willingness to participate filling out this questionnaire which purpose is to analyze the congruence between the application of the competency-based approach and the assessment of oral competencies in English Courses in higher education.

Completing the questionnaire will take you about 10 minutes. Your answers are valuable for this research project. Additionally, we want to assure you that the information you provide will be used exclusively for research purposes.

Check the following box if you accept completing this questionnaire.

I agree _____

Gender

- A. Female
- B. Male

Age

- A. 27-30 years old
- B. 31-40 years old
- C. 41-50 years old
- D. 50+ years old

Years of experience in higher education

- A. Less than 5 years of experience
- B. 6 - 10 years of experience
- C. 11 - 15 years of experience
- D. 16 - 20 years of experience
- E. More than 20 years of experience

How do you encourage oral production in classes?

What kind of activities do students perform in classes to improve their oral competence?

- A. Professor asks questions to students directly
- B. Students practice in small groups in breakout rooms
- C. Professor holds debates, and students give their point of view.
- D. Students react to videos or text provided by the teacher in class
- E. Other

Which communicative competencies do students achieve at the end of each learning unit?

- A. How do you assess communicative skills in your classes? *
- B. I keep track of students that participate in class
- C. I ask proving questions to students to encourage participation

- D. I ask students to modify a conversation studied in class.
- E. Other

How many oral evaluated activities do you carry out in a term?

- A. 0
- B. 1-2
- C. 3-4
- D. 5-6
- E. more

What percentage of the learning unit final grade do you assign to oral production?

- A. 10%
- B. 20%
- C. 30%
- D. 40%
- E. 50% or more

How could assessment and the development of speaking skills be improved in your classes?

- A. By asking student to turn on their cameras, and make sure they are in class.
- B. By having longer sessions
- C. By having more sessions, a week
- D. By having fewer students in the group
- E. By assigning speaking tasks as homework (recorded presentations, podcasts, etc.)
- F. Other

Write any additional comments you may have on the research topic: Congruence between the competency-based approach and assessment of oral competencies in English courses in higher education.

Appendix 2

Assessment of Oral Competence in EFL Classes in Higher Education – Questionnaire 2

Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Interviewee: _____

Instructions: Read one question at a time to the interviewee taking notes of the answers provided and do not forget to record since the introduction starts. Allow enough time to the interviewee to answer each question and ask more information when an answer does not seem to give enough information.

How are communicative skills developed in your basic English class?

What competencies do your students achieve at the end of each period?

How can assessment and performance be improved in your classes?

How do you evaluate a student's linguistics abilities?

Appendix 3

Documental Observation sheet for syllabus.

Instructions: Observe the task guidelines and check for the elements included in this observation sheet. Add comments in the observation column.

Criteria	Observed	Not observed	Comments
Basics			
Subject identification			
Course description			
General competency			
<i>Does the competency include the 4 elements? (Verb, object, purpose, and condition)</i>			
Competency elements			
<i>Are the competency elements aligned with the general competency?</i>			
<i>Do the elements of competence reflect learning to know, to do, to be and to live together?</i>			
Indicators of achievement			
<i>Do indicators of achievement indicate the development communicative competencies?</i>			
Assessment			
Learning evidences			
<i>Is there a clear description of tasks?</i>			
Assessment criteria			

<i>Does the criterion match the assessment?</i>			
Assessment tools			
<i>Are the assessment tools detailed in levels of achievement?</i>			
Methodological strategy.			
Scheduling of activities			
Content / Units			
Learning strategies			
<i>Is there a variety of learning strategies?</i>			
<i>Are the learning strategies oriented to competency-based approach?</i>			
Learning methodology			
<i>Is there a clear description of the learning methodology?</i>			
English productive skills development			
<i>Are the English productive skills promoted by the learning methodology and learning strategies selected?</i>			
English receptive skills development			
<i>Are the English receptive skills promoted by the learning methodology and learning strategies selected?</i>			

Appendix 4

Documental observation sheet for oral competency assessment task

Instructions: Observe the task guidelines and check for the elements included in this observation sheet. Add comments in the observation column.

Element	Yes	No	Comments
Competency <i>Does the competency include the 4 elements? (Verb, object, purpose, and condition)</i>			
Achievement indicators <i>Do they comply with the competency-based approach assessment principles?</i>			
Evaluation criteria <i>Are the criteria included congruent with the activity to be performed?</i> <i>Do the criteria evaluate students' oral competence?</i> <i>Do the criteria reflect the elements: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together?</i>			
Activity description <i>Is there a detailed description of the requirements of the expected learning evidence?</i>			
Learning to know			
Grammar			
Vocabulary			
Pronunciation			
Learning to do			
Language functions			
Fluency			

Learning to be			
Metacognitive task.			
Learning to live together			
Self-assessment.			
Co-evaluation			