

The scope of oral skills in certified English learners. Case study: Ecuadorian students with certifications of A1, A2 and B1



Alcance de las habilidades orales en estudiantes de inglés certificados. Caso de estudio: estudiantes ecuatorianos con certificaciones de A1, A2 y B1

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Abstract

A proficient speaker of a language is a subject capable of mastering each of the linguistic skills in it. Therefore, when referring to a certified apprentice, we are talking about an individual who has mastered the main competencies in what concerns: listening, speaking, writing, reading, thinking and even reasoning in the language that is acquired. The article that follows, seeks to reflect on the true scope of oral skills in students with certifications A1, A2 and B1 in the English language, within the Ecuadorian educational context, considering the mandatory situation for students in order to obtain a high school and college diploma.

Keywords: Education, English, Languages, Skills development.

Resumen

Un hablante proficiente de una lengua es un sujeto capaz de dominar cada una de las habilidades lingüísticas en la misma. Por lo tanto al hacer referencia a un aprendiz certificado, se está hablando de un individuo que domina las principales competencias en lo que concierne a: escuchar, hablar, escribir, leer, pensar y hasta razonar en la lengua que se adquiere. El artículo que a continuación se presenta, busca reflexionar sobre el verdadero alcance de las habilidades orales en estudiantes con certificaciones A1, A2 y B1 en el idioma inglés, dentro del contexto educativo ecuatoriano, considerando la situación de obligatoriedad para los estudiantes a fin de obtener un diploma de bachillerato y de la universidad.

Palabras clave: Educación, Inglés, Idiomas, Desarrollo de habilidades.

Author's translation.

Educational policies in South America are undergoing transformation. So far monolingual education is not enough for students to be prepared to face an increasingly competitive society, in which full command of several languages has become an instrumental fact to an ordinary requirement for obtaining a high school or college diploma. There are countries like Ecuador, which have developed academic educational plans, to graduate students with an A2 or B1 level, and for universities to achieve students with a B2.

Hence, institutional alliances have emerged between the active forces of the Ecuadorian educational sector and organizations that certify internationally, and that demand as an indispensable requirement that students have a high level of command of the foreign language.

Many students have mastered the essential processes of writing, grammar and listening, becoming great English learners in a structured and formal educational environment, which prepares them to obtain the required score to achieve one of these certifications and graduate. Leaving aside the real purpose of these educational changes, many students struggle to meet the requirement, and once obtained, they abandon any opportunity to advance in a real English language acquisition process. Hence, there are more and more individuals with international certifications that accredit them as fluent in the English language but who in a communicative reality are ineffective to act in accordance with the level for which they have been trained.

It seems that all this training aims for the student to receive a B1 or B2 certification that accredits them as users of the English language in which they have achieved linguistic proficiency, when reality is far from it. It is true that the fundamental aspects of English as a foreign language can be mastered with precision, but if real oracy is not achieved, it would be an individual who speech lacking the elements that strengthen effective communication.

There are four skills that must be evaluated in a truly proficient student in the use of English as an accredited language. These are: physical skills, linguistic skills, cognitive skills and socio-emotional skills.

When dealing with physical skills, we would be talking about two specific competences to be explored in detail: the first is vocal competence (the voice), in which it is evaluated if the student has fluency and good pace in speech, the variation of tones with which one speaks according to the context or communicative situation, the voice projection and clarity in pronunciation. And the second, is dealing with the skills related to the body language of the learner, we have to pay attention to aspects such as: natural gesticulation during the communicative act, the naturalness of the posture during the communicative act, facial expressions and even eye contact.

Linguistic skills evaluate the choice of vocabulary during the communicative act, as well as the use of a varied language with an acceptable vocabulary (language variation), if the communication is done through the use of a grammatically correct speech or not (register and grammar). The competence of the discursive structure must also be evaluated, taking into account the organized communication of ideas and finally there is the evaluation of rhetorical technique competences in which it must be considered if the student uses rhetorical techniques such as metaphors, humor, irony and even mimicry.

Cognitive skills identify in the student the scope of content competencies, identifying if the content that best expresses the meaning and intention of what is being explained has been chosen, and if the student constructs the speech taking into account that expressed by the interlocutor. The proficient speaker must have the clarification and summary competence to demonstrate that a search for information and clarity has been done through questions. The competence of self-regulation should also be borne in mind, in which the student focuses on the communicative task and the time is used correctly. Within this group of competencies is also reasoning, in which it must be seen if the student expresses the reasons that support his view, and it must be identified if the student critically examines the ideas and views expressed. Finally there is the audience awareness competence, in which the student is aware of the level of understanding of their interlocutors.

In the last place on the evaluation scale is the socio-emotional ability, which in the first instance is about identifying the competencies of working with others, it must be seen if the student guides or manages the interactions: it must be seen if he has control of the discursive situation when necessary. Next, listening and res-

ponding skills must be taken into consideration, understanding if the student is an active listener and if their responses are appropriate. Finally, there are the competencies related to self-confidence when speaking, if the certified learner have liveliness when speaking and if the student have his own style when communicating.

It is necessary to carry out studies that assess the reality of language learning and acquisition in educational contexts of ordinary and extraordinary training, in order to identify if the implementation of these educational policies are being truly effective, and if so, measure and establish and measure the degree of effectiveness, based on evaluations that identify not only the achievement of conceptual competences but also verify compliance with the proposed objectives by incorporating high-level teaching and mastery of the English language, evaluating in depth and significant orality in certified learners. ©

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