

## CI-UNA: An Effective Conversation Language Program at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension

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**Resumen:** El valor que radica en la evaluación de programas de idiomas se dirige hacia el poder responder preguntas claves sobre el logro de objetivos curriculares, la efectividad de prácticas de clase, satisfacción de los sujetos (estudiantes, profesores, padres y otras personas interesadas), diseño curricular, idoneidad de materiales para la enseñanza, el progreso del aprendizaje, la institución, el ambiente y el desarrollo del personal (Richards 287). A raíz de la importancia de evaluar programas de idiomas, este documento presenta un reporte escrito de una evaluación realizada a un programa de inglés en la Universidad Nacional, Sede Regional Brunca llamado Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA). Esta evaluación se llevó a cabo durante cuatro meses y siguió el paradigma naturalístico con un enfoque formativo e iluminativo. Se diseñaron cinco instrumentos para obtener la información por parte de estudiantes, profesores, desarrolladores y miembros de la comunidad. Los hallazgos dieron como resultado recomendaciones concretas para el programa.

**Palabras claves:** evaluación de programa de idiomas, paradigma naturalístico, enfoque formativo, inglés como lengua extranjera

**Abstract:** The value of language program evaluation is directed toward the answering of key questions related to the curricular achievement of goals, the effectiveness and appropriateness of classroom practices, satisfaction of subjects (students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders), curriculum design, suitability of materials of instruction, learning progress, the institution, the environment and staff development (Richards 287). Due to the importance of evaluating language programs, this paper presents a written account of an evaluation conducted to an English language program at Universidad Nacional, Brunca extension named Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA). This evaluation took four months and followed a naturalistic paradigm in which a formative and illuminative focus was given. Five different data gathering instruments were designed and administered to the students, the teachers, developers and community members. The findings resulted in concrete recommendations for the program.

**Keywords:** language program evaluation, naturalistic paradigm, formative focus, English as a foreign language.

## I Introduction

Recent developments in the evaluation of language education programs have incorporated needs assessment, implementation and formative evaluation has taken center stage. It means that this type of evaluation is now directed toward the gathering of multiple perspectives in order to make suggestions and improvements. There is a significant change of direction in this subject. In essence, this shift explained that “Instead of looking only at students achievement-the product- critics were asking that attention be paid to what was happening in the classrooms” (29). Currently, a new perspective of education evaluation can be defined as “rather than forcing a choice between the two paradigms so that the methods available for program evaluation are limited to either positivistic or naturalistic ones, I have argued for the pragmatic stance of allowing the combination of both methods” (39). To do this, evaluators in practice should stop focusing only on test results but to pay close attention to the need to collect information about all aspects of a curriculum including design, teaching and learning processes; material of instruction and teacher’s and students’ variables.

By analyzing the information obtained from the curricular achievement of goals, the effectiveness and appropriateness of classroom practices, satisfaction of subjects (students, teachers, parents, and stakeholders), curriculum design, suitability of materials of instruction, learning progress, the institution, the environment and staff development, not only evaluators but the audience in general will be able to make decisions in order to improve the program under scrutiny. Brown (1995) stated that the value of evaluation is based on the possibility “to determine the general effectiveness of the program, usually for the purpose of improving it or defending its utility to outside administrators or agencies” (233). Based on these premises, aspects such as the effects of teaching methodology, use of the target language and suitability of the textbook delineate this evaluation. Along with the connection between testing and course objectives, the students’, teachers’ and managers’ perceptions are of great focus.

### 1.1 Main Goals

The main components of this program evaluation are *needs analysis*, *objectives*, *testing*, *materials* and *teaching*. As a start, the next objectives guide this evaluation:

1. To evaluate Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA) as an effective conversational language program offered to the community.

### 1.2 Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the congruency between the program planning/organization and the intended objectives.
2. To identify whether the pedagogical processes implemented in the class are consistent with the program requirements.

3. To identify if the textbook used aids the program expectations.
4. To provide administrators, coordinators and teachers of Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA) at Universidad Nacional, Brunca campus with a description of the achievement of the program's outcomes.
5. To provide suggestions and recommendations to the administrators to improve the program.

## II Literature Review

### 2.1 Why Program Evaluation

The starting point for this understanding is the definition for program evaluation. According to Lynch (1996), it is “the systematic attempt to gather information in order to make judgments or decisions” (2). Based on this premise, the main rationale for this type of evaluation emerges. That is, language programs must be in constant review, so that the learning process leads to successful outcomes. In order to guide students toward communicative competence, not only goals but also methodology, testing and needs must be under a magnifying glass that can reveal true facts, whether weaknesses and strengths, in any specific language program. Richards (2001) stated that evaluation of a program “focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language program in order to understand how the program works, and how successfully it works, enabling different kinds of decisions to be made” (286). From this perspective, it can be stated that any evaluation has a final direction which is to make decisions.

### 2.2 Approaches to Program Evaluation

Four main approaches when evaluating a program are identified by Brown. He (1995) outlined the product-oriented, the static-characteristic, the process-oriented and the decision-facilitation approach. First, the *product-oriented* approach is said to be directed toward the evaluation of goals and instructional objectives. Its success lies on the degree to which objectives proposed for that program are accomplished at the end of the process. Second, the *static-characteristic* approach is carried out by outsiders who focus on examining accounting and academic records such as the number of books, capacity of classrooms, the parking facilities and the types of degrees held by the faculty. This type of evaluation is used in accreditation processes in many different institutions. Third, the *process-oriented* approach is considered to be a significant shift from the previous ones since it justifies the need for dynamism by opening to possibilities for unexpected outcomes. This evaluation makes a clear difference between formative and summative models. Goal-free evaluations takes part in this approach, it is explained as “evaluation in which limits are not set on studying the expected effects of the program vis-à-vis the goals” (Brown, 1995, 222). Finally, the *decision-facilitation* approach facilitates decision making by leading evaluators to judgment. As Brown stated, “they [evaluators] favor gathering information that will help the administrators and faculty in the program make their own judgments and decisions” (Brown, 1995, 223). This decision-making factor is what makes program evaluation outcomes valuable since a concise purpose is driven after the scrutiny process.

### 2.3 Positivist versus Naturalistic Evaluation

Two different designs are identified along the process of language program evaluation; they are positivistic and naturalistic. The positivistic design involves a summative perspective in which quantitative data is pursued. In here, testing students and analyzing their grades is an evidence of the effectiveness of the program. As Lynch (1996) explained “when the evaluation audiences and the evaluation goals require evidence of whether, or how well, the program is working, the traditional choice of a design for gathering and analyzing information is one of a set of experimental and quasi-experimental designs” (70). On the contrary, the naturalistic design sees program evaluation as a process in which variables and conditions can not be controlled. It supports the idea that reality is not objective, and that it can only be explained through an interpretation of the context in which events take place that is why tests are not valid sources of information to make judgments about a particular program.

### 2.4 The Elements of Curriculum Evaluation

Language program evaluation must be directed toward the incorporation of specific elements of a language curriculum. These elements are needs analysis, objectives, testing, materials and teaching. Needs analysis is viewed as the identification of the linguistic and social needs of the target population. To accomplish this, not only learners but also “many other sources and types of information must be considered in doing a sound assessment of their needs” (Brown, 2000, 20). Administrators are demanded to survey the needs of the learners in each community. Once the needs are identified, the objectives must be established; they should go together with the students’ necessities. Brown (2000) defined objectives as “precise statements about what content or skills the students must master in order to attain a particular goal” (21). In this specific language program evaluated, conversational needs for professional demands are identified; consequently, the objectives outlined in the program are merely conversational.

The kind of evaluation to be administered must match the needs of the course. Testing or assessment procedures must be delineated in accordance with classroom performance. As Hughes (2003) explained “if the test content and testing techniques are at variance with the objectives of the course, there is likely to be harmful backwash” (1). Summative or formative evaluation takes a key role since final outcomes will be a reflection of its effectiveness. In the course evaluated, testing takes a central role since quizzes and formal tests are included. Another element to consider is the instructional material used. Material development is a reflection of particular philosophies of teaching. Therefore, there must be a match between materials and methodology. As Brown (2000) argued, “material choices and use will be affected by what is learned from each of the other components of a program and will in turn have an effect of their own on those other components” (23). Finally, language teaching defines the methodology to be used in each curriculum.

There are many different methodologies under the Communicative Approach scope; nevertheless, three current types of instruction are the Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT), the Task-based Instruction (TBI) and Eclectic instruction. Though its theoretical principles are not well-defined, the Eclectic methodology plays a significant role because of its flexibility. Larsen-Freeman (2000) explained that in this type of instruction teachers who use it “pick and choose from among methods to create their own blend” (183). Having the program evaluated a communicative goal; the TBI is suggested by the administrators to instructors. In this methodology, students build communication through problem-solving, the negotiation of meaning and the connection between new and previous knowledge. Three basic stages are identified in this pedagogical process which are pre- activity, while activity and post-activity. Three main principles of this instruction are: the uses of information-gap activities, the class activities have a perceived purpose and a clear outcome and the teacher breaks down knowledge into smaller steps to complete tasks (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, 144-149). To accomplish this, instructors attend a training session before teaching.

### **III Validity and Reliability of this Study**

This section defines validity under a specific scope which is language program evaluation. Validity can be interpreted from two different perspectives: positivistic and naturalistic. For the purpose of this project both perspectives play an important role. A positivistic perspective of validity explains that results should be objectively perceived and achieved. As Lynch says “a hallmark principle of this paradigm is the notion that the reality that we seek to know is objective, existing independent of our minds (42).” Cook and Campbell’s contribution in this regards leads to the identification of four dimensions which are statistical conclusion validity, internal validity, construct validity and external validity. The extent to which each of these dimensions are addressed in this project would be explained later in this section. In contrast with this perspective, naturalistic validity comes into play. This perspective defines validity as concept in which reality, in this case results, depends on the particular historical and cultural settings where it takes place. Lynch expands this notion when explaining that naturalistic validity is “the degree to which the evaluator and the evaluation audience place trust and confidence in the evaluation analysis and conclusions (65).” Next, the role of each perspective is explained by making reference to the techniques used to avoid bias and threats in this project.

Though this evaluation is not positivistic in nature (it does not have an experiment), some threats to positivistic validity are intended to be ruled out by addressing them directly. They are low statistical power, instrumentation, selection, inadequate theory and evaluation apprehension. Low-statistical power is diminished by selecting an appropriate amount of sample, eighteen students, one professor and two developers in fact. Instrumentation’s threat is minimized by designing different instruments (questionnaire for teachers, students and administrators), piloting these instruments and establishing clear objectives per each one. Selection is ruled out by choosing the group at random so that it does not influence the results. Trustworthy theoretical basis supports this evaluation in order to minimize the effect of inadequate theory. Finally, evaluation apprehension is treated by carrying out thick and consistent observation to the subjects.

This evaluation is qualitative in nature; that is why validity from the naturalistic perspective takes a central role. To do that, Maxwell’s typology explained in Lynch’s is outlined. His contribution establishes valid evaluation by labeling it as descriptive, interpretative, theoretical, generalizable and evaluative. This evaluation is descriptive since the information provided from the data gathering instruments are well-explained; consequently, a factual account on information is presented. It is interpretative because students’ views about the program are captured through the classroom observations and the questionnaire. This evaluation is theoretical since a literature review is included in section two which supports constructs and concepts on the topic under evaluation. This evaluation was carried out in one group and due to the congruency and similarity with the other groups from this language program, internal validity takes place. Finally, it is evaluative since value judgments are implicitly included throughout this project.

Naturalistic validity is assured by including three assessing techniques which are member check, thick description and triangulation. Member check includes the repeated checking of constructions and findings with the participants (students, coordinator and developers) in formal and informal meetings. Thick description in different sections of this project verifies validity since detailed accounts on the findings and how they were gathered are included. As a final point, triangulation assesses validity by gathering and reconciling data from questionnaires for students/ teachers/developers, observations to the classroom dynamics and interviews with developers and other language programs in the region.

The next checklists were designed and completed to assess this evaluation’s naturalistic and positivistic validity.

### 3.1 CHECKLIST TO ASSESS POSITIVISTIC VALIDITY

**Evaluator:** Lenna Barrantes Elizondo.      **Date:** June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011

**Program to be evaluated:** CI-UNA

Objective: This checklist aims to minimize the effect of negative constraints that can affect validity in program evaluation from a positivistic paradigm.

THREAT	QUESTION TO ANSWER	ANSWER		REMEDIAL PLAN What can I do to minimize/treat this situation?
		YES	NO	
-low statistical power	Is the sample size large enough?	X (it includes all ss in the course evaluated)		
-inadequate theory	Did I include sufficient theoretical basis to support the constructs involved?	X (more than three topics are)		

		included)		
-hypothesis guessing within program group.	Am I acting authentically? Am I manipulating the information?		X	
-history	Are there events surrounding the participants that can affect them/the program?			Difficult to know, some observations outside the classroom were carried out; however, there was no evidence of an obtrusive event.
-evaluation apprehension	Are the participants modifying their behavior?	X (they are more open to ask questions to the researcher, a less participative role should be played)		
-maturation	Has the population changed/growth?		X	
-experimenter expectancies	Am I influenced by my own expectations?		X	
-testing	Are testing procedures effective?			Does not apply.
-interaction of selection and treatment	Is the treatment influencing the evaluation of the program?			Does not apply.
-mortality	Is the number of participants who finish the evaluation consistent with the number of participants who started?	X		
-interaction of setting and treatment	Is the setting influencing the evaluation of the program?		X	
-selection	Is the selection of participants appropriate?	X (it includes all ss in the course evaluated)		
- interaction of history and treatment	Are previous exciting events influencing the		X	

	evaluation of the program?			
-resentful demoralization	Are participants in the traditional group being demoralized?			Does not apply.

### 3.2 CHECKLIST TO ASSESS NATURALISTIC VALIDITY

**Evaluator:** Lenna Barrantes Elizondo. **Date:** June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011

**Program to be evaluated:** CI-UNA

Objective: this checklist aims to minimize the effect of negative constraints that can affect validity in program evaluation from a naturalistic paradigm.

THREAT	QUESTION TO ANSWER	ANSWER		REMEDIAL PLAN What can I do to minimize/treat this situation?
		YES	NO	
Descriptive validity	Is all the information based on facts I can prove?	X		
Interpretative validity	Did I consider the participants' insights by capturing their opinions?	X (through the questionnaire)		
Theoretical validity	Did I include sufficient, precise and trustworthy theories and principles?	X		
Generalizability:	Can I generalize conclusions?	X (only to this course-level 1)		
Evaluative validity	Are judgments valued and considered?	X		
Triangulation	Did I enhance the evaluation by including multiple data sources?	X (5 different instruments were used)		
Multiple Perspective negotiation	Did I include a consensus among persons from different perspectives in relation to the program?		X	Due to time constraints.
Utility	Are the evaluation findings useful for administrators, managers, and other stakeholders in terms of the	X		



		decisions they need to make?			
Authenticity	Fairness	Did I take into account the multiple perspectives of the various evaluation stakeholders and participants?	X		
	ontological	Did the participants gain information?			Not all of them. Teacher and administrators did, but students did not.
	Educative	Are understandings and appreciation of the program increased?	X		
	Catalytic	Are clear decisions made from this evaluation?			Not yet.
	Tactical	Are program stakeholders and participants empowered by the evaluation?			Not yet.

This next section outlines the main elements included in the procedures and analysis of data of this language program evaluation. Aspects such as audience, subjects, data gathering instruments and interpretation of data are the main focus here.

### 3.3 Audience

The audience of this research is three folded since it involves administrators, coordinator and developers, and teachers of the language program Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA) at Universidad Nacional, Brunca extension.

### 3.4 Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension Administrators

Universidad Nacional, Brunca Region campus (UNASRB) is a branch of Universidad Nacional. It is located in San Isidro de El General, the main district of Pérez Zeledón county. In 2010, professionals in the English department started a language program offered to the community. This program is named Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA).

### 3.5 CI-UNA Coordinator and Developers

CI-UNA does not require the admission test of UNA; instead, students take a placement test if they want to. Otherwise, they start the program in level 1. This program has increased its population since it started with three groups from the first level. This program takes two years; it is divided into ten courses (levels) which are taught in a two-month period each. CI-UNA offers conversational courses which aims to develop the four linguistic skills. Students attend classes five hours a week, one of them is taught in the language laboratory. There are different schedules for community members to

choose, depending on their needs. Students must pay one fee and buy the required textbook which is *American English File*. There is one coordinator and three developers, who are also professors at UNASRB, in charge of the project.

### 3.6 Teachers Working for CI-UNA

To work with CI-UNA, teachers must fulfill specific requirements. Some of these are: to have a graduate degree in the field, carry out a professional interview and participate in training on the Task-based instruction. Once, they are hired there are responsibilities they have to follow. It is mandatory to use the Task-based instruction, keep a weekly plan with a specific format, administer the tests, use the evaluation rubrics and follow the schedule in the course outline.

The next chart states the audience profile by delineating possible perspectives and expectations from each of the subjects involved in this project. This information will assist the evaluator to have a clear view of interests.

Table 2.1 CI-UNA Evaluation: Audience Profile

Grouping	Members	Perspectives and expectations
<b>Managers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program coordinator</li> <li>• Dean</li> <li>• Academic director</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for reputation</li> <li>• Academic rigor</li> <li>• Prestige concerns</li> <li>• Success</li> </ul>
<b>Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program developers</li> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional improvement</li> <li>• Program improvement</li> <li>• Success</li> </ul>

**Note:** This table was adapted from *The Elements of Language Curriculum: A Systematic Approach to Program Development* by James Dean Brown.

### 3.7 Evaluation Design and Data Collection

In order to gather key data, this program evaluation follows a naturalistic design. The main reason lies on the contribution this method brings to classroom scenarios. As Lynch explains, choosing this design helps evaluation since it “can describe the program from a variety of points of view” (107). Taking into account different perspectives is a feature characteristic of this project since it incorporates views from the teacher, the coordinator and developers, and students. The information will be recorded, summarized and interpreted in the form of words. However, the quantification of certain data will be displayed in graphs. In addition, a formative point of view shapes this evaluation. According to Brown, , its aim is to “collect and analyze information that will help in improving the curriculum” (225) and this is, indeed, one of the main goals of this evaluation since it schedules a stage devoted to give an oral report to administrators and

teachers, so that they reflect on the possibility to make decisions based on the results obtained.

### **3.8 Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection instruments designed gather data from each of the elements of program evaluation. In order to obtain data about needs analysis, the coordinator and developers were interviewed. Revealing information about program objectives is provided from different sources which are key-informant interviews and a questionnaire for students. In addition, a key-informant interview with the developer in charge of designing the testing procedures is included. Different structured non-participant observations are conducted to gather information about the pedagogical processes implemented in the class as well as the materials of instruction used. Finally, a questionnaire for the teacher and another one for students provide insights regarding the role of the instructional materials used. Next is a description of each of the instruments designed.

*Questionnaire for students:* it includes questions about the role of the material used, testing and the organization of the course.

*Questionnaire for the teacher:* information about the methodology implemented is the aim of this instrument. Data about the textbook and organization of the course are also included.

*Structured non-participant observation:* a reconstruction of classroom events focused on pedagogical strategies and use of materials will come out through these observations. They are structured since both are composed of a chart with specific descriptors and a tally record to quantify behavior. In addition, it is labeled as non-participant because the evaluator will play an unobtrusive role in the class development. To do this, the evaluator designed two scales. One of these observation charts aims to gather specific information to identify if the textbook used aids the conversational expectations of the course. The second chart is directed toward the collection of data to identify whether the pedagogical processes implemented in the class are consistent with the program requirements.

*Key-informant interview (developer):* its main goal is to gather information about the tests designed for the course. They are not accessible to the public.

*Phone interview:* four different language schools were called in order to get key data regarding CI-UNA's current accessibility for the community members. The main objective was to get other programs' characteristics to compare and contrast them with the program under evaluation. The information requested was fee, duration and materials.

### **3.9 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This program evaluation consisted of analyzing needs analysis, objectives, methodology, the use of the textbook, testing, the use of the mother tongue and the course itself. In addition, perception solicited from students, teachers, and administrators is included as a salient part at the end. The purpose of this section is to provide information about the

results of this data analysis. The first part presents a summary of the coding used when analyzing the data. This code will be used in the graphs and matrices.

<b>TXT</b> = textbook	<b>+</b> = positive comment
<b>OBV</b> = observation	<b>-</b> = negative comment
<b>TBI</b> = methodology	<b>I</b> = interview
<b>E=OT</b> = evaluation, oral tests	<b>QT</b> = questionnaire for teachers
<b>E=WT</b> = evaluation, written tests	<b>QS</b> = questionnaire for students
<b>Obj</b> = objectives	

### Needs Analysis

In order to state that CI-UNA indeed satisfies the members of the community needs regarding accessibility and quality, information from other language programs in downtown San Isidro was obtained. Then, a comparison and contrast analysis was carried out. The next diagram summarizes information from all programs.

**Figure 3.1 Information about Language Programs in the Community**

	Monthly fee	hours per week	overall duration
<b>CI-UNA</b>	• ₡27 875	5 h	2 y. / 2 m
<b>Shakespeare Institute</b>	• ₡21 400	2 h, 30 min	2 y. / 6 m.
<b>Escuela Internacional de Idiomas</b>	• ₡40 000	3h, 30 min	2 y.
<b>Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano (CCCN)</b>	• ₡ 44 500	3h	2 y. / 2 m
<b>Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED)</b>	• ₡20 000	4 h	2 y. / 8m

**Note:** This information was gathered through phone-interviews.

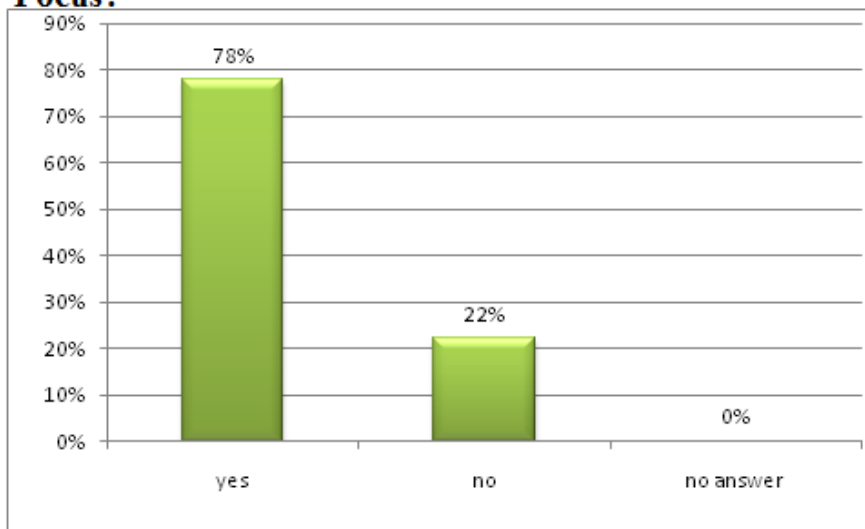
As this figure shows, all programs vary in monthly fee, hours per week and duration. Regarding hours per week, CI-UNA is the one that has more weekly contact hours with students which leads to the conclusion that students have more exposure to the language. Though UNED seems a cheaper option, it does not offer accessibility regarding registration possibilities since it offers just two courses a year. The course already started,

so people who are interested should wait until year 2012. When hours per week and monthly fee are contrasted between Shakespeare and CI-UNA, one can realized that even though the former is cheaper, students attend half of the time students in CI-UNA do. EscuelaInternacional de Idiomas is not only the most expensive program but also the shortest that makes it not a good option. Centro Cultural CostarricenseNorteamericano is also an alternative for the community; however, it is also more expensive and contact hours are less than the ones offered by CI-UNA.

### The Objectives

Developers revealed that the main objective of this language program is to provide the community with an accessible high-quality learning of English which has a clear emphasis on developing conversational skills. That is why, not only the teacher but also the students were asked about this issue. Concrete data were revealed. The next graph shows the students opinion about the matter.

**Figure 3.2 Does the Course Evidence a Conversational Focus?**



The big majority of the group (78%) agreed that the course has a conversational objective that is accomplished through everyday class performance. In contrast, a 22 % of the students did not share the same opinion and answered that the course does not have a conversational focus.

The observations carried out by the evaluator reveal that the course provides a high-quality conversational focus since students have access to a language laboratory in which speaking activities were performed. In addition, the linguistic level of the teacher provides students with challenging input since she has shown to have a high level of performance. The textbook used also gives learners the opportunity to practice the speaking skill. In addition, throughout the observations students were given the chance to make use of the target language in real situations.

The information obtained from six structured non-participant observations carried out is the basis of the analysis of this topic; however, answers provided in the questionnaires by the teacher in charge and the developers reveal key facts. According to the teacher and developers, the program suggests teachers to use the Task-Based Instruction (TBI) to everyday teaching. This method focuses on engaging students into a task for which meaningful communication is needed to attain a linguistic goal. In this methodology, students build communication through problem-solving, the negotiation of meaning and the connection between new and previous knowledge. Also, language instructors must make full use of the textbook. Based on these premises, the next eight events shed into light.

First, during all the observations the teacher used the textbook as main source of instruction; that is, the number of exercises done with the textbook exceeds the exercises without the textbook. Nonetheless, the textbook does not follow the TBI since it follows a topical syllabus with explicit grammatical and phonological explanations. Exercises are presented as isolated units and not as a step by step process that engages students into a task for which meaningful communication is needed to attain one linguistic goal. Only one class was directed toward the performance of a role play in which the teacher built schemata, and after that the students developed some exercises from the book that help them get input in the form of a step-by-step procedure. During the rest of the observations, there is no record of pre/while and after activities. Second, in none of the classes observed the teacher provided information-gap activities which is a principle from TBI. Third, students were usually asked to work in pairs. In fact, during all the classes observed they solved one, two or three exercises in pairs. This issue gave them the opportunity to use the target language to give authentic use of it. In addition, in all the observations the teacher provided students with speaking activities. Some of them were to create a picture story, to interview a partner, to present a role-play, to check homework and to answer direct oral questions. Fourth, students showed some constant use of the mother tongue (L1) in all the classes. They used it when solving pair or group work exercises, when answering oral questions and when they were off-task. Their low proficiency level might be the main reason for this practice. It is important to mention that the teacher constantly encouraged learners to avoid the L1 by explaining the class rules in English.

Fifth, deductive instruction of grammar structures was present throughout the classes. The theme was presented in the book and then the teacher gave one more explanation on the board. After that, students solved exercises in the grammar section of the book. The use of possessive pronouns, possessive adjectives, subject pronouns, simple present, the use of *get* versus *have* and the possessive “s” were the grammatical structures presented. Students reacted toward this type of instruction by paying attention, giving their own examples and taking notes. Sixth, students were constantly checking long homework from the workbook. In fact, in observations 3 and 4, students and teacher took more than 40 minutes to check it. In addition, the way homework was checked was monotonous because the teacher just read the sentence or question from the workbook and students answered voluntarily which means that not all students participated; hence,

not all doubts were clarified. They usually checked from two to three pages which took a significant amount of time in the class. Actually, a student commented that this aspect needs improvement since practicality is not clear. S/he said that doubts cannot be clarified when exercises are solved at home, and that there is not enough time in class. Seventh, the teaching resources available consisted of a CD player, the teacher's textbook, a classroom with desks for each student and the language laboratory. In this laboratory, students made use of the console to solve listening and speaking activities. While observed, they worked there three times. They work in pairs creating conversations while the teacher monitored what they did. They also used the headphones to listen to conversations and fill in the blanks. Finally, due to administrative decisions, people from different ages can enroll the program. Thirteen is the minimum age and there are no limits for adult people. As a consequence, in this group the multi-age phenomenon arises.

### The Textbook

In order to gather enough and reliable data about the effectiveness of the textbook used in the course, different instruments were designed and applied. They were the structured non-participant observation scales, the questionnaire for the teacher and the questionnaire for the students. The textbook used is *American English File 1* published by Oxford University Press. Next is a description of the corresponding findings. This information was provided by the participants of the course. Percentages show that students were not very sure about the conversational emphasis of the textbook since only a 28% agrees that the book has this focus. In contrast, a 39 % partially agrees, and still a 22 % disagrees. Their answers are an evidence of a disparity between the students' perception and the goal of the course since there is not a clear majority agreeing with what the conversational focus of the course. The teacher also provided key information about the topic. She said that the topics in this textbook are interesting, and that they offer enough speaking and listening exercises. She also answered that it gives communicative tasks for learners to interact. These findings reveal a contrastive perception of the communicative goals of the textbook in which the teacher and students differ. Students have a clear and common opinion about the significance of the book since all of them said that it is an important tool for the course development. This finding is supported with the data gathered from the observation scales which reveal that the textbook is used a lot. In all the classes observed, students and teacher solved exercises and carried out activities by using the book as reference. In addition, none of the students ever forgot to bring it to the class. Some of the exercises included in the textbook were fill-in-the-blanks, completion, error correction, true and false, matching (pictures and words/ words and definitions), reading and listening comprehension. The instructor promoted individual, pair and group work with the book; however, individual work was more frequent. She also solved exercises by working with the students, it means she read the instructions and asked specific students to give the answer. When doing this, she called out students at random.

## Testing

Testing was a key theme of evaluation in this research. The information gathered revealed positive and negative aspects regarding this topic. The data provided by the teacher unveil that there is a match between the kind of testing carried out and the topics, the class exercises and the conversational aim of the course. In addition, the developers and teacher agreed on the quantity of tests. They mentioned that students take four quizzes and two tests in which listening comprehension and speaking production are emphasized. The teacher is in charge of designing the test while one developer designs the midterm and final tests. According to the teacher, an aspect to improve regarding testing is the kind of item to solve. Students must take an interview and she thinks that it limits the students' ability to ask questions because they get accustomed to give answers only. The students also provided key data about the topic. Students answers revealed that most of the students (83%) agree that the types of tests they take follow the similar format, content and procedures that they carry out in class. Only 6% of the group disagreed and said that they are not. Learners' answers disclose the fact that the developers and the teacher direct testing toward the same conversational goal of the program, which highlights speaking and listening.

A negative aspect found regarding testing is the fact that the test procedures are not designed in accordance with the time available. It was observed that the teacher took too much when administrating an oral test (I). She started at 5:00 p.m. (an hour before the class started) and finished at 7:40 p.m. (one hour before the class was finished). Though the teacher assigned some exercises from the book, the class performance was not successful since students were constantly off-task. This test requires one-to-one proctoring which makes it impractical, and practicality is a classic criterion for testing a test's accuracy.

## The Use of the Mother Tongue

As a salient topic regarding classroom dynamics, the use of the mother tongue by the teacher deserves special attention. That is why, the next information provides a glimpse of the impact of its use during the observation process. Students' insights about the issue are also analyzed. When asked whether or not the teacher used the target language (L2) in class, the majority of students agree that the instructor used it while 17% of the class did not think the teacher used it all the time. This finding is supported by the data gathered from the observation scales that reveal that the teacher always used the L2. In fact, there is no record of Spanish use. English was used in all the stages of the class since the beginning when greeting, when giving instructions, when checking homework, when solving and checking the exercises, when pushing them to speak more in the L2 and when assigning extra class work. Most of the students believe that using the target language during the whole class may shadow English learning while only 22% of the class responded that it is definitely hindered. 17 % of informants said that using only English does not affect their learning process. Their main argument to be against the full use of the L2 is that they do not understand everything that is said in class, and perhaps they are not internalizing concepts and topics, as they could do, if some explanations in



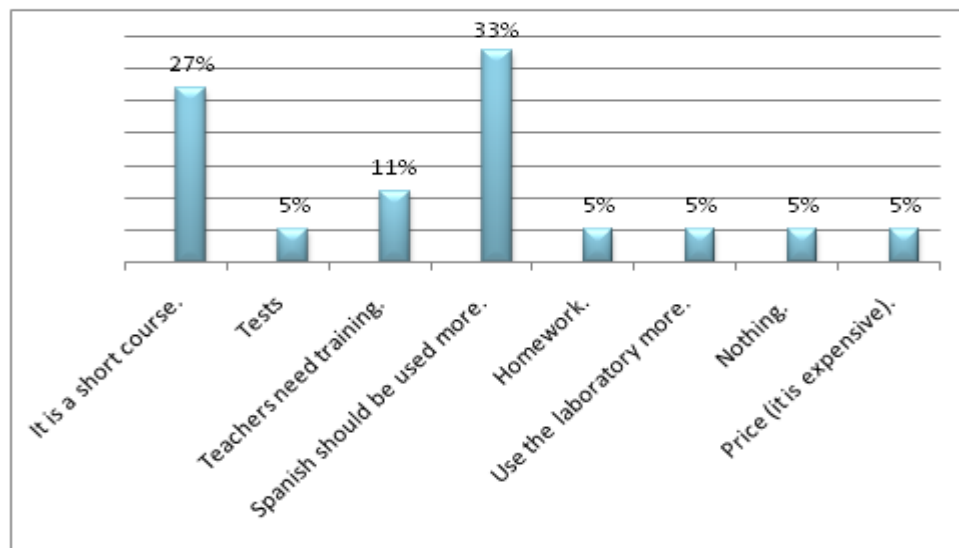
their mother tongue will be given. The teacher also said that students show some difficulty when following the book. This situation can be a consequence of a linguistic constraint that limits their successful performance.

When students were asked to give their opinion about whether or not the teacher should use more L1 in class, only 28% agreed and the big majority (56%) was not really sure. A low number of students (17%) believe that it should not be used at all. Some of the pupils' arguments to be in favor of the use of Spanish in the class consist of the necessity of giving clearer instructions since sometimes they do not understand the topic or what they have to do. They urged the need to provide some L1 explanations at the beginning levels of language instruction which is the case of CI-UNA 1. On the contrary, students who agree with using only English answered that this is the only way to learn faster and better. In addition to the informants' answers, it was observed during classes that some students were always asking others for clarification or guidance because they did not understand the steps to follow.

## The Course

The next analysis presents general aspects of the program that according to the students, teacher and developers need to be improved. The questionnaires are the primary source of data gathering in this section of this evaluation.

**Figure 3.3 Aspects to Improve**



**Figure 3.3** This information was obtained from the students' questionnaire.

Since this was an open-ended question, students' answers vary. However, similar opinions were given. First, many of the students believed that Spanish should be used more in order to improve the program. Next, they agree that it is a really short course and that time is serious constraint in their learning. Also, 11% of the students said that the

teacher needs specialized training. The rest of the informants said that homework need to be redefined, that they should use the laboratory more, and that it is an expensive course. Only 5 % of the students responded that the course does not require any improvement. When the informants were asked about the price specifically, the majority of students (67%) said that it is not an expensive course since it is accessible. On the contrary, 33% of them believed that the course is not affordable. In fact, they mentioned that the price was higher this period and that perhaps they would not be able to continue with the program. One student said that for people who do not work it is hard to pay the fee. Developers also revealed salient data regarding some of the improvements the course and the program require. They think that among the aspects to improve there is a need to train teachers in the way they should handle the textbook effectively. Also, they think that developers need more information regarding paperwork procedures and managing requirements since they have never gotten any administration training. In addition, they identified a need to restructure testing procedures since the items suggested (the interview) took about three hours and a half. This idea is reinforced by one of the teacher’s comments that shed light into the disadvantages of testing.

### The Subjects

This section systematizes information previously mentioned to uncover in a clearer way the subjects’ opinion about themes under evaluation. Information provided by the subjects reveals similarities and differences in opinion. In order to have a better understanding of their position about the different topics evaluated, the next matrices will be displayed and interpreted. The coding included at the beginning of this chapter is a must so that the connections in this section are understood.

Table 3.2 Effects Matrix: CI-UNA Project Evaluation

AS SEEN BY	OBJECTIVES	PROGRAM	TESTING
<b>STUDENTS</b>	+ 78% of students agree it has a conversational emphasis	- Spanish should be used more - it is not accessible (\$)	+ integrative tests (OT/WT) +connection between what is done in class
<b>TEACHER</b>	+ they match with testing, methodology and the TXT	- it needs improvement	- tests take too long - in I, students only answer questions
<b>DEVELOPERS</b>	+ high-quality courses + accessible courses for the community (\$) + conversational emphasis	+ it is fulfilling their expectations - it needs some improvement (testing, administration and teacher training)	+ 4 quizzes, 2 tests + speaking emphasis - tests take too long

Similarities encompass subjects' opinions when they mentioned that tests take too long when administrated. Also, they agreed when addressing the conversational focus of the course, and when showing consciousness about the need for improvement. A remarkable difference is in evidence when students and developers contradict their opinion about the price. Some learners said that it is an expensive program while authorities argued that it is accessible for the community. Students and teacher also share their ideas regarding the connection between testing and class work because both embed a conversational focus. While some students think it is not an accessible course, developers agree that it is.

Table 3.3 Effects Matrix: CI-UNA Project Evaluation

AS SEEN BY	TEXTBOOK	METHODOLOGY	USE OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE
STUDENTS	+ it is significant for the course + They like the book +it has a conversational focus (61%)	+ speaking is practiced a lot	-It hinders class performance and learning + it is necessary to have full contact (no Spanish)
TEACHER	+ enough conversational focus -Too fast (ss have difficulty following the steps)	+connection between methodology and the textbook - contradiction between the course obj and the TXT	+/- uses the target language all the time
DEVELOPERS	-teachers need training on how to use it	+ teachers must follow the TBI	

Some of the similarities identified are that teachers and students agree with the conversational focus of the book. Also, they said that there is a connection among the textbook, the methodology used and the speaking practices performed in class. There is a difference in opinion in the informants. They have a different perception about the use of the target language. Some believed they should use it all the time while others answered that they need some Spanish in key steps during the learning process. This same issue was observed, and it showed that some learners did not have any problem in understanding; meanwhile, other pupils needed help from another student. In addition, the teacher believed that the book is difficult to follow due to its organization, but the majority of students like it.

## Recommendations

This evaluation has denoted issues in need of improvement. In this final section, the evaluator outlines a set of recommendations. First, it is recommended to include more information in the brochure distributed to the community since it includes vague details.

Second, a restructuration of the methodology used must be considered. To shift from the TBI to the CLT seems a good option because the book used has a clear match with the CLT. The CLT “aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the Communicative Approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching” (Larsen Freeman 121). This principle is in accordance with the goals of CI-UNA. Changing the book is not a good choice because it has shown to satisfy the conversational needs of the course.

Another recommendation is to ask the teacher to use more body language and to reformulate information given in the class to reach low-proficient learners. It was noticed that those students are at a disadvantage because they do not understand simple classroom instructions. Then, if easy instructions were not grasped, it is clear that more complex explanations are neither understood. Consequently, the teacher needs to switch naturally to simplify input. Though students recommended using the mother tongue in certain circumstances, it will be better to avoid its use and reinforce the negotiation of meaning to attain all students’ understanding. Another pedagogical recommendation is to use different grouping techniques so that students are forced to mingle with other classmates. It was observed that learners tended to sit next to the same people and in the same place all the time.

It is also recommended to consider students’ age when organizing groups. The multi-age phenomenon can hinder the learning process. Whether students are too young to assimilate structures or learners are too old to receive nurtured instruction. Adults are able to handle linguistic metalanguage because of their intellectual capacity. They can also concentrate for an extensive period of time while teenagers are at a transition stage in which their attention span can still be short. As Brown explains “adults have superior cognitive abilities that can render them more successful in certain classroom endeavors” (90); in contrast, teenagers surrounding factors like ego and self-esteem are different; consequently, “care must be taken not to insult them with stilted language or to bore them with overanalysis” (92). Based on this premise, age differences must be a determiner to place students into specific groups.

It is also recommended to schedule a training session with OUP representatives. It is known that they train teachers on how to use the textbook successfully and to take advantage of all the elements of the book pack. This multipack includes student book, workbook with MultiROM, teacher’s book, videos, class audio CD, test generator and a website. This session should be directed not only to teachers but also to the developers, so that they can train future teachers.

Another recommendation is directed toward the duration of each course. After analyzing the course outline and its corresponding topics, it is concluded that the course is too short to teach all the topics included. An alternative choice would be to shorten the list of topics; in that way, the teacher will be free to devote more time to reinforce complex aspects, and students will not feel pushed to finish the mandatory topics.

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