UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA—FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

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QUALITY EVALUATION OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES IN THE CHAIR OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR I IN THE FACULTY OF LANGUAGES OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF CÓRDOBA

TRABAJO DE TESIS PRESENTADO POR FABIÁN NEGRELLI

DIRECTORA: MGTR. SUSANA LIRUSO

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation is itself often perceived as threatening the interests of those involved in the object of evaluation. Hence, evaluation tends to be neglected. However, Argentinian policies on education are currently giving increasing importance to improving the quality of education at university level. Consequently, the evaluation of such processes is especially relevant for the universities, inasmuch as it helps to define efficient plans to guaranteee quality. Evaluation of the teaching and learning processes involves collecting evidence, from all the participants involved in such processes, for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the methodology implemented. A successful evaluation generates outcomes that are valid, reliable and indicate directions and actions for improvement. In this context, its main objective is to collect facts the course developer can and will use to do a better job, and facts from which a deeper understanding of the educational process will emerge. We all agree that teaching is a multidimensional activity, in which one of the most powerful dimensions is that of "teacher as researcher". As a result, not only do teachers need to use research in their practice but also to participate "in action". In this investigation, our main objective was to judge the quality and effectiveness of a course of study, more particularly, the Chair of *English Grammar I* in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba, to improve an optimize the didactic and pedagogic classroom practices. The findings are based on the responses from a population of 250 students who took the subject in the academic year 2010 and 4 teachers who were in charge of conducting the teaching and learning processes during the same academic year. To fulfil our objective, a number of aspects concerning the teaching and learning processes were evaluated. Among such aspects, we can mention the course objectives and its contents, the instructional design, the study materials, the assessment practices, the student achievements. The instruments employed for the study include records, documents and questionnaire-surveys. The investigation was a mixed study, since it was about a process in which the researcher gathered, analysed, and linked quantitative and qualitative data into one single study in order to answer one problem. It is worth pointing out that practically no studies on evaluation of a course of study at university level are available in the public domain, and let alone in our institution. Hence, we hope that this study will help us, teachers, continue focusing on the value of teaching and learning as the fundamental mission of education, as the enhancement of quality in teaching and learning must be a continuous effort within an educational institution.

NOTES

➢ While we accept the principle of non-sexist language in scholarly writing commonly recommended in recent years, we have tried to make not too much an issue of it in this study. Hence, in the present study, we have used masculine forms he / his / him, etc. whenever they seemed natural and stylistically convenient on the argument that they can be understood as unmarked for sex unless otherwise indicated by the context.

➢ In the context of this investigation, a *course* should be understood as a unit of teaching that typically lasts one academic term, led by one or more instructors, and whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge. On the other hand, a *programme* should be considered as a combination of the core, required and elective courses and/or requirements leading to a degree or certificate.

➢ Even though the terms *evaluation* and *assessment* have not always had distinct meanings, for the purpose of discussion in this paper, we have adopted the definitions of *evaluation* and *assessment* by Brown (1989, as cited in Weir and Roberts, 1994: 4). Brown defines *evaluation* as "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to determine the level of quality of a performance or outcome that enables decision-making based on the level of quality demonstrated within a context of particular institutions involved". On the other hand, he states that *assessment* is "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to provide feedback on knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the purpose of elevating future performances and learning outcomes".

➢ Taking into account the particular research context of this work, it was necessary to make a difference between "Escuela de Lenguas" and "Facultad de Lenguas". Hence, "School of Languages" has been used to refer to the former, while "Faculty of Languages" has been used to refer to the latter.

➢ Whenever a quotation in Spanish, of which no official translation exists, was considered worthy of citing in order to widen the theoretical framework of the study, the researcher provided his own translation.

Some English-Spanish Equivalents Used in this Study

Academic Council of the School of Languages: Concejo Académico de la Escuela de Lenguas

Board of Education of the Faculty of Languages: Concejo Directivo de la Facultad de Lenguas

Board of Education of the National University of Córdoba: Concejo Superior de la UNC

Extra-mural or external students: Alumnos Libres

Faculty of Languages: Facultad de Lenguas

Group of students: Comisión

Office of Academic Affairs: Secretaría Académica

Plan of Studies: Plan de Estudio

School of Languages: Escuela de Lenguas

Student-Assistant: Ayudante-Alumno

Students in good standing: Alumnos Regulares

Teacher-Assistant: Profesor Asistente

Teacher-in-Training: Profesor Adscripto

Teaching, Translation and Licentiate Programmes: Carreras de Profesorado, Traductorado y Licenciatura

The Adjunct Professor: el Profesor Adjunto

The Chair: la Cátedra

The English and Portuguese Language Modules: Módulos de Idioma Inglés y Portugués.

The English Department: Sección Inglés

The Head Teacher, the Chair Professor: el Profesor Titular

The Students´ Office: Despacho u Oficina de Alumnos

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

> The uniqueness of each classroom setting implies that any proposal – even at school level – needs to be tested and verified and adapted by each teacher in his own classroom. The ideal is that curricular specification should feed a teacher´s personal research and development programme through which he is increasing his understanding of his own work and hence battering his teaching … It is not enough that teachers´ work should be studied: they need to study it themselves.
>
> (Stenhouse, 1975, as cited in Nunan, 1990: 76)

1.1. Overview of the Chapters

In this first Chapter, we intoduce the research problem addressed by the present study and refer to the motivations for undertaking it. We also consider the arguments for confining Applied Linguistics to a concern with foreign-language teaching and learning. Finally, we describe the context of study and outline the research questions and objectives of this investigation. In Chapter 2, we provide the antecedents in the field of quality evaluation of the teaching and learning processes at university level in Argentina. In Chapter 3, we start by defining some key cross-disciplinary terms in this study; we subsequently describe those models, theories and/or approaches that have served to carry out this investigation. In Chapter 4, we move on to refer to the participants in this study; the materials used; and the piloting, data collection and analysis procedures. In Chapter 5, we confine our attention to the analysis and description of the current Plan of Studies as well as the course syllabus. We also refer to the structure of the Chair of *English Grammar I*, the academic record of the teaching staff and their roles and duties. In Chapter 6, we present the outcomes of this investigation together with a discussion of the results obtained. Chapter 7 concludes the research with the presentation of the pedagogical implications that derive from this study, some avenues for further research, and final considerations.

1.2. Motivations for Research

Even if in the last few years there has been growing support for evaluation in our country, it still has to gain acceptance among educators. Some threats to this acceptance are lack of evaluation knowledge, time constraints, negative predisposition to evaluation, or a deadly fear to face the results. Not only do evaluations generally reveal multiple stories and different perceptions of the reality of an experience - sometimes giving rise to contradictory evidence -, but they also highlight institutional politics, as there are usually multiple stakeholders with vested interests in particular aspects of the development and delivery processes. Regarding this matter, Kinnaman (1992: 2) states:

> Despite its promise for progress, programme evaluation still has a tarnished reputation among educators. In fact, for many of us, just hearing the word evaluation evokes a negative response. It conveys the risk of failure and creates an atmosphere of vulnerability. It tends to conjure up fears, warranted or not, that someone´s position or programme may be in jeopardy.

The main motivation for the present study has become from a pedagogically driven concern: we consider evaluation as a tool which can be used to help us, teachers, judge whether our instructional approach is being implemented as planned, and to assess the extent to which the stated goals are being achieved. We believe that by carrying out a thorough evaluation of the teaching and learning processes implemented in the classroom, we will be able to answer questions such as: Are we doing for our students what we said we would? Are students learning what we set out to teach? How can we make improvements to the curriculum and/or teaching practices? In other words, evaluating the implementation of the teaching and learning processes in our classroom is central to generate reliable and useful findings that can eventually be used as the basis for decision-making improvement.

It must be pointed out that this investigation stemmed from the premise that university teachers must take the main responsibility for what and how their students learn. Students have only limited choices in how they learn: They can attend lectures or not; they can work hard or not; they can seek truth or better marks – but teachers are the ones who create the choices open to them.

Thus, in this dissertation, we will provide a comprehensive account of the substantial evidence as well as the abundant context-sensitive information that we have gathered,

which will allow us to take actions to optimize didactic and pedagogic classroom practices and hence improve the quality of the teaching and learning processes developed in the Chair of *English Grammar I* in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba.

1.3. The Relationship between Applied Linguistics and Language Programme Evaluation

Becoming aware of the true value of programme evaluation is fundamental, as it can serve several important purposes in the development of instruction, including (but not limited to) goal refinement, documentation, determination of impact, and programme improvement (Hawkes, 2000). As teachers in higher education, we should be aware of the fact that, in order to become more professional in our approach to teaching, we should match our professionalism in research. In these terms, evaluators are viewed as methodologists who apply the tools of research to answer questions about the quality of what they are evaluating. As Hanson (1978: 97) puts it "good evaluation is central to the continued development of a profession".

Brown (1995: 233) claims that "evaluation is not a simple issue but rather a complex of interrelated issues". Following Brown, this study has been anchored in the field of Applied Linguistics - more specifically, in the area of curriculum development. Within this area, a recurrent issue is to collect information systematically in order to indicate the worth or merit of a programme or project and to inform decision making. The result of this analysis can then become the basis for decisions about further professional action.

In this context, the question that may arise is why Applied Linguistics should be concerned with programme evaluation. In part, the answer to this question lies in the perennial need for language education programmes to be evaluated, be it motivated by an internal quest for programme improvement – as it is the case of this study – or by an externally imposed requirement in order to justify programme funding.

It is generally accepted that Applied Linguistics does not lend itself to an easy definition, perhaps because, as Cook (2006, as cited in Davies, 2007: 1) remarks, "Applied Linguistics means many things to many people". In the words of Spolsky (2005: 36):

> […] Applied Linguistics is now a cover term for a sizeable group of semiautonomous disciplines, each dividing its parentage and allegiances between the formal study of language and other relevant fields, and each working to develop its own methodologies and principles.

Cook (2003: 5) defines Applied Linguistics as "the academic discipline concerned with the relation of knowledge about language to decision making in the real world". Even though Cook (2003: 7-8) suggests that "the scope of applied linguistics remains rather vague", he attempts to delimits its main areas of concern as consisting of language and education; language, work and law; and language information and effect.

A review of the literature reveals that many authors have referred to the relationship between applied linguistics and language education. Nunan (2005: 226) notes that:

> Applied Linguistics is a broad interdisciplinary field of scholarship that encompasses theoretical, empirical, and practical work in diverse areas including first language education, second language acquisition, language pathology, speech and hearing, and language use in social and professional contexts.

Much in line with Nunan´s belief, McGrath (2002: 1) remarks that:

> Those with a responsibility for the development and administration of language-learning programmes in either educational or workplace settings will need little persuading that materials evaluation design, along with, for example, syllabus design, learner assessment and the study of classroom processes are centrally important applied-linguistic activities.

Nunan & McGrath´s viewpoint is adhered to by Davies (2007: 19), who writes:

> Evaluation of language-teaching projects is a good example of the kind of activity applied linguists are called on to perform. What makes their contribution special, that is an applied-linguistics contribution, is, in my view, that they bring to the evaluation a readiness generalised through model making.

From the above, we can conclude that the challenge of applied linguists is to bring together the language, the learner and the teaching situation. In this regard, Davies (2007: 83) claims that "that is the challenge and there is the value of applied linguistics to language teaching and language learning".

Following Van Lier (1991: 80), "when theorists and researchers prefer to distance themselves from practical involvement in pedagogical affairs, teachers have no choice but to do their own research in order to investigate their own practice (or praxis, to use the Aristotelian term)".

We strongly support Jacob´s view (1987: 36) that "Applied Linguistics research is concerned with the application of knowledge and methods of inquiry from a variety of disciplines to the range of issues concerning the development and use of language". We agree that this may be considered a broad definition; however, it does not limit the application of knowledge and methods to traditional language concerns; rather, it opens it up to the emerging social and political aspects of language learning and use.

From this perspective, programme evaluation can play an essential role in the development of Applied Linguistics as a field of research. In this regard, we agree with Cumming (1987: 697), who distinguishes second language programme evaluations from other applied research because of its special ability to "document actual interrelationships between program policy, rationale, instructional procedures, learning processes and outcomes, curricular content, and a specific social milien".

1.4. Context of the Study

1.4.1. The object of study in this investigation

The object of study in this investigation is the study course *English Grammar I*. This is a core subject taught in the second year of the Teacher Training, Translation and Licenciate Programmes in EFL in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba (UNC). Students are expected to make progress from an intermediate to a post-intermediate level of English.

1.4.2. A brief account of the history of the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba

Taking into account that this study has been anchored in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba, we will make a historical account of the institution.

The current Faculty of Languages was born in 1920 as a Language Department of the School of Law and Social Sciences, which had been created in 1791 by a resolution of Viceroy Nicolás A. Arredondo. The main goal of this Department was to offer university students the possibility to learn a foreign language as a complement of their cultural and professional training. Following these lines, French, Italian and concepts of law-related Latin were taught.

In 1926, the Language Department becomes the Language Institute, with the aim of training teachers of foreign languages. This Institute was under the University Rector's Office and four languages were taught: French, English, German, and Italian. When it was created, the authorities decided to give graduates a degree that would enable them to teach the foreign language they had studied. The initial objectives were thus modified and a new profile adopted.

In 1943, the Language Institute gave birth to the School of Languages under the control of the Rector's Office. New subjects were included in the plans of studies and the number of chairs and teachers was considerably increased; moreover, the Application Department was created with a double objective: firstly, providing teacher-in-training students with a place where they could perform their teaching practices; and secondly, facilitating anybody interested in learning a foreign language at a non-professional level to improve their culture as an optional activity. It is worth highlighting that the Application Departament – or Cultural Department, as is currently called – still fulfils this dual goal. At present, the languages that are taught in this Department are English, French, Italian, German, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Arab, Hebrew, Quichua, Russian, Polish and Dutch. There are also courses in Medical and Business English; Reading Comprehension integrating three languages: Italian, French and Portuguese; Reading Comprehension in either English, French, German, Italian, or Portuguese.

In 1949, the cultural function of the School of Languages was broadened, with the creation of new teacher training classes for other languages and even Spanish. Years later, the training courses for Translators and Licentiates were created.

With the passing of time, the plans of studies went through different modifications - 1953, 1958, 1969, 1976 and 1990-, which allowed for greater flexibility, adequate professional learning and an updated pedagogic education. Didactic and pedagogic subjects were implemented in the Teaching course and technical subjects were implemented in the Translation course. The Translation course was granted a new structure that led to a larger professional specificity, introducing legal education subjects that allowed the graduate to act as a public officer.

The growth of the School of Languages was hand in hand with a permanent adaptation of the academic-administrative structure to meet growing demands of the increasing number of functions resulting from the different areas.

The quality in the education of its professionals, the updated plans of studies, the development of an extension policy to meet the environment requirements, research

projects and exchange programmes with foreign universities, made the School of Languages an institution of renowned history. The growth of this Academic Institution and its strong insertion in the community led to the transformation of the School of Languages into the current Faculty of Languages. This was achieved on 5th November 2000 by a University Assembly.

Nowadays, the Faculty of Languages offers fifteen undergraduate courses in the fields of teaching, translation, and research. The three strands have a common core track, where *English Grammar I* is taught. Students can hold a degree as teachers, translators and/or licenciates in any of the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

The Faculty of Languages runs a Masters Programme in English with a Specialization in Applied Linguistics or Anglo-American Literature; a Masters Programme in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language; and a Masters Programme in Translation. It also offers a Doctoral Programme in Language Sciences.

The Faculty of Languages´ Programme of Study also includes a Translation Specialization Programme; students have the possibility of specializing in Scientific and Technical Translation, Legal and Economic Translation, and Interpretation. Besides, non-structured post-graduate courses are taught both through the traditional and distance mode education.

In the year 2000, the Faculty of Languages was designated by the Board of Education of the National University of Córdoba to organize, design and administer the English and Portuguese Language Modules for all the students attending the different graduate courses in the UNC. Since then, this academic unit has been carrying out all the necessary activities to efficiently carry out the assigned task.

In the year 2001, as a consequence of the great increase of research activities in the Faculty -shown by the number of research projects submitted by teacher-researchers of this institution before national and provincial agencies such as SECyT (Science and Technology Secretary's Office of the UNC), Agencia Córdoba Ciencia (Córdoba Science Agency) and CONICET (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research) and also shown in the considerable increase of post-graduate scholarships- the Science and Technology Secretary's Office of the Faculty of Languages was created with the aim of taking care of all research related aspects. It is in this Office where the Center for Research in Language Sciences of the Faculty of Languages (CIFAL, in Spanish) works. This department focuses on research in the fields of linguistics, literature and culture,

translation, language theoretical-and-applied didactics, and the study of information technologies and communications for language education.

In addition, through the Extension and International Relations Office, the Faculty offers non-university level language courses, such as the Intensive Language Courses (in German, French, English, Italian and Portuguese); Spanish Courses for Foreigners, special programmes for university students or teachers, and international exams, such as the Certificate of Spanish: Language and Language Use (CELU).

The Faculty of Languages also has a Department for Distance Education, which was created to provide both teachers and students with an alternative to traditional education, introducing new ways of communication. The current academic offer is constituted by the Distance Education Introductory Course for German, French, Italian and Portuguese, Extra-curricular Post-graduate Courses, and the Translation Specialization Programme.

1.5. Research Questions and Objectives of the Present Study

To close this chapter, we will present the research questions and the objectives of this investigation. The objectives of this study can be divided into *general* and *specific*. The following objectives were established in order to obtain answers that would allow us to take actions to optimize didactic and pedagogic classroom practices and thus improve the quality of the teaching and the learning processes developed in the Chair of *English Grammar I* in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba.

1.5.1. Research Questions

Considering the concerns stated above, this study investigates the following research questions:

(i) What is the quality of the learning resulting from teaching?

(ii) What is the quality of the enhanced learning capability resulting from the teaching?

(iii) Is the current approach to the teaching of *English Grammar I* relevant to the School of Languages´ needs and expectations?

(iv) What type of approach can meet the demands and needs of the students in a more appropriate and effective way?

1.5.2. Objectives of this Study

The following objectives will help explore the research questions and fulfil the main aim of the work.

General objective

To evaluate the academic quality of the teaching and the learning processes implemented in the Chair of *English Grammar I* within the context of the Teaching, Translation and Licentiate Programmes of the English Language Section in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba (UNC) during the 2010 academic year in order to facilitate the systematic improvement of their quality by knowing the strengths, weaknesses and needs.

Specific objectives

1. To describe the historic and institutional context (mission, objectives, etc.) in which the course studied in this investigation is taught.
2. To analyse the objectives of the Teaching, Translation and Licentiate Programmes of the English Language Section at the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba and the graduates' profile in each programme, according to the current Plan of Studies.
3. To analyse the characteristics of students who attended the subject *English Grammar I* in the academic year 2010: age; gender; previous knowledge at the beginning of the year; level of knowledge at the end of the year; number of students enrolled in the course; number of students who actually attended the subject; number of students who attended as students in good standing (que cursaron en calidad de *Alumnos Regulares*); number of students who kept their good standing condition (*Alumnos que obtuvieron la Regularidad en la asignatura*); number of students who finished the study course as extra mural students (*Alumnos Libres*) due to the low grades they got during the year; number of students who dropped out during the academic year (*Alumnos que abandonaron el cursado de la asignatura*).
4. To describe and analyse the characteristics of the study course as they are stated in the current Plan of Studies.

5. To describe and analyse the objectives, disciplinary specific contents, proposed methodological approaches, schedule of activities, didactic materials, assessment methodology and criteria, as described in the current syllabus of the course.

6. To analyse the way in which the different described indicators were put into practice in order to reflect upon them and detect strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

7. To analyse the students' attitude towards the teaching and learning processes developed, and towards the didactic and pedagogical practices implemented in the classroom while teaching *English Grammar I* during the school year 2010.

8. To verify the existence or lack of inter-chair activities and their characteristics.

9. To describe and analyse the academic and professional background of the teachers that are part of the Chair of *English Grammar I*: teaching degrees and antecedents; experience in teaching the subject; responsibilities and role in the Chair; research activities.

10. To describe the classroom work environment: student-teacher relation, inter-student relation, inter-teacher relation.

11. To analyse the teacher-student ratio.

12. To analyse internal and independent assessment systems to guarantee the academic quality of the teaching and the learning processes.

13. To analyse the collected data, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to overcome the weaknesses detected by generating changes in the teaching and learning classroom practices implemented.

CHAPTER 2

QUALITY EVALUATION OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ANTECEDENTS IN ARGENTINA

> Broadly speaking, evaluation is the discovery of the nature and the value of something... It is not exactly the search for relations, an inventory of the present situation or a prediction of future success. It is a bit of each, but only as long as it helps to understand the substance, the functioning and the value of the object evaluated.
>
> (Stake & Denny, 1969)

In the previous chapter, we intoduced the research problem addressed by the present study and referred to the motivations for undertaking it. We also considered the arguments for confining Applied Linguistics to a concern with foreign-language teaching and learning. Finally, we described the context of study and outlined the research questions and objectives of this investigation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the antecedents in the field of quality evaluation of the teaching and learning processes at university level in Argentina. To serve this purpose, we will first make reference to the antecedents concerning the National System of Higher Education in our country; then, we will refer to the antecedents at the National University of Córdoba and in the Faculty of Languages.

2.1. Antecedents at University Level in Argentina

Given that the educational authorities consider the quality of the teaching and learning processes as an essential requisite for the enhancement of education quality, in the last few years it has gained importance not only in academic contexts but also in political ones. This is the reason why the improvement in teaching requires the broadening of the assessment limits for it to be applied effectively to the education system. In this context, the assessment activity is essential to analyse up to what extent the different elements of the education system are contributing to the improvement in education quality.

Institutional self-evaluation set the basis for the rise of the university as an institution in terms of recognising and diagnosing institutional problems. It is in this possibility of

recognising itself as part of the same symbolic universe, observed in university governors and managers, that the self-evaluation process plays a fundamental role.

According to Araujo (2007: 85), "in self-evaluation, the rise of the university depends on the creation of information regarding the institution itself, recognized as an asset for the actors involved in the process." Araujo warns that in an organisation characterized by its symbolic disintegration derived from the knowledge specialization, around which scholars build their identities, institutional evaluation, as well as where interdisciplinary research is required, works as a matrix for symbolic integration. Indeed, we believe that, beyond any internal tensions in the definition and the approach towards the problems, self-evaluation is a tool that allows university managers to recognise themselves as members of the same body.

The inclusion of evaluation of university institutions in Argentina took place at a time of tensions and negotiations between the National Ministry of Education and the National Inter-University Council (Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional, CIN), a coordinating agency formed by the presidents of all national universities. Said tensions were the expression of the effects that brought the new pattern of relationships installed between the State and the universities, in which evaluation was considered to be an interference in university autonomy. This process, which began in the end of Raúl Alfonsín's presidential term and which was realised during the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem through the Subproject 06, started in 1991 and developed under the World Bank-funded Programme *University Quality Improvement* - evidenced *conflicting interactions* between the policies promoted from the central levels and the change strategies put forward by some institutions. In this regard, Acosta Silva (2000: 33-34) understands as conflicting interactions "the articulation that occurs between implementation processes of public policies and the reforms (or resistance to such changes) that take place in public universities". According to Acosta Silva, the concept refers to the different stages of the relationships between the State and the universities where the interests and the projects of the actors are negotiated. Acosta Silva states that these conflicting interactions or articulations do not occur, however, in every field or area where the interactions between State and universities take place. He claims that the results are not homogeneous, and that we can find asymmetries and different rhythms in institutional changes, public policies and university reform processes.

Although it is not the aim of this study to make a brief on such conflict, we must point out that the most significant tensions took place amidst a respectful evaluation of

universities' autonomy, a basis for change interpretation and improvement rather than an instrument of punishment, for the purposes that it should have had, and for the most adequate methodology to accomplish it.

Hence, the confrontation between the State and CIN resulted in a negotiation process, which, together with the incorporation of some university proposals, favoured the beginning of institutional assessment after the signing of specific agreements between some universities and the Office for University Policies (Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias, SPU). These first initiatives proved a turning point in evaluation policies, for it began to be accepted by the universities themselves.

Until 1991, the problem of education had been part of other topics in the State Reform agenda - such as financing, tuition, alternate sources of financing, internal efficiency of the system, management, etc. -, from which it gradually began to separate to become a problem with its own characteristics; however, despite the fact that it was formed more by its actors rather than by its formulation, it was hand in hand with the need of regulating a system of higher education that had become more complex and had differentiated from it significantly due to the effect of the number of institutions, students and teachers. Evaluation had thus become a topic of debate outside the CIN. In this context, in 1991, the University of Salta organized the First National Meeting on Quality Evaluation, which proved the interest on the topic at the bottom line of the university system. In fact, there was a great discussion about the sense and the evaluation control in the country, which - owing to the public universities unwillingness to innovate - was not organised as part of the system.

In 1992, a plenary meeting took place in La Plata; on this occasion, it was agreed to form a Permanent Monitoring and Analysis Committee. That regional committee was formed by different academic representatives of each area and was the result of the CIN's Teaching Committee.

Early next year, the CIN disclosed a document named *Evaluation for the Improvement of University Quality. Strategies, Procedures and Tools (Evaluación para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad Universitaria. Estrategias, Procedimientos e Instrumentos).* This document received some criticism basically regarding the system of judges it proposed, the predominance of a fundamentally quantitative vision, as well as the methodological relevance of the indicators for measuring quality.

In April 1993, CIN ended Subproject 06-related activity, since it considered the adoption of the document *Evaluation for the Improvement of University Quality* non-

convenient as an instrument for National Universities (Plenary Agreement # 97/93. Concordia, April 16th, 1993).

That separation from the CIN, which was apparently independent, occurred when the power to generate and implement policies of the Ministry of Culture and Education was consolidated by the creation of the Office for University Policies (Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias, SPU). After this breach between the CIN and Subproject 06, the SPU proposed a parallel policy aimed at establishing quality evaluation and university enhancement projects. Mutual agreements were signed with universities with different political backgrounds; nevertheless, the largest and more traditional institutions remained out of the agreements. In this way, the assessment via contracts was introduced in spite of the fact that neither the executive organism nor the relevant legislation had been constituted.

From 1993, the National Ministry of Education and Culture signed 16 agreements with national universities: two of them were signed with associations of faculties, and one with a private university to plan and implement processes of institutional evaluation. These agreements granted, on the one hand, counselling toward the creation of self-evaluation tools, which finally ended up on the hands of the institutions; on the other hand, they granted assistance to create and coordinate independent evaluation committees. In 1995, within the framework of the programme, the evaluation of three National Universities was completed: Universidad Nacional del Sur (Southern National University), Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (National University of Cuyo), and Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia Austral (National University of Southern Patagonia). The responsibility for enforcing the remaining agreements on external evaluation was taken up by the National Committee for University Evaluation and Accreditation (Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria, CONEAU), created by the Higher Education Act (LES, in Spanish) #24521/95. Since that moment, its institutional mission has been to ensure and improve the quality of the Study Programmes and institutions of the Argentine university system by implementing university education quality evaluation and certification activities; furthermore, it has taken the responsibility of following up the remaining agreements regarding independent evaluation activities.

We must also point out that in November 1994, the Latin American Laboratory for Evaluation of the Quality of Education was created, with fourteen member-countries, one of which was Argentina. One of the main tasks of this agency was to establish regional standards that serve as a reference in the education processes of member countries.

At the end of 1994, the Ministry of Education created the Postgraduate Programme Certification Commission (Comisión de Acreditación de Posgrados, CAP). In 1995, this agency called in for the voluntary certification of academic Masters and Doctorate Programmes. More than 300 postgraduate courses from different public and private universities answered the call. CAP determined their certification, with positive results in two-thirds of the applications and, depending on their quality, classified certified programmes in three categories. Later on, the National Ministry of Education transferred these certification procedures to CONEAU and considered CAP functions finished.

Undoubtedly, one of the axes of higher education is to promote the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning processes and their results "to respond to the internal demands of the University itself, for which, excellence has been a permanent quest, since it is inherent to its own basic values and nature" (Sánchez Martinez, E., 1999). The Higher Education Act # 24521 establishes, in general though repetitively, patterns of quality for higher education when it states, for example, that its aim is to "provide with scientific, professional, humanistic and theoretical education at the highest level..." (Article 3); "to educate scientists, professionals and technicians characterized by the intensive training ..." (Article 4, Paragraph a), which is later repeated in Article 27, when it refers to university higher education institutions, which "have as a goal the generation and communication of the highest level of knowledge...". Among the basic functions of these institutions, it mentions "instructing and training scientists, professionals, teachers and technicians who can act with a professional attitude..." (Article 28, Section a).

According to Araujo (2007: 80), "one of the particularities for the quality evaluation actions in Argentina has been the early distinction between evaluation and certification activities, initially under the authority of the SPU and then carried out by CONEAU". Thus, CONEAU, whose functions were determined in Article 46 of the Higher Education Act # 24521, began its functions in 1996. The Committee's guidelines for institutional evaluation, indicate that:

> The evaluation must be useful to interpret, to change and to improve, rather than to standardize, to prescribe, and let alone, 'to set penalties'. That is why, evaluation must be carried out in permanent and participative fashion, creating a system with continuous feedback".

Along these lines, the institutional evaluation is also conceived as an important tool of transformation of universities and of the education practice, as a permanent and

systematic practice, aimed at finding problematic areas and positive aspects through a constructive and participative process of consensus. This implies reflecting upon the task itself as a contextualized activity that considers both quantitative and qualitative aspects and the supplies, the product and their impact on society.

It is worth noticing that CONEAU's responsibilities include actions connected with institutional evaluation of public and private management, the evaluation for institutional projects for the creation of national and provincial university institutions so as to get their final recognition by the National Ministry of Education, and the certification of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Thus, since 1996, it has evaluated institutional projects; since 1997, it has evaluated yearly reports for university institutions with provisional authorization, has carried out independent evaluation, and has certified post-graduate courses; since 1999, it has evaluated final and private recognition applications for graduate courses.

CONEAU is formed by 12 members appointed by the Executive National Government, three members by the National Inter-University Council -national universities- one by the Council of Private Universities Rectors, one by the National Academy of Education, three by the National Higher Chamber (Senate), three by the National Lower Chamber (House of Representatives), and one by the Ministry of Education. Besides, the Committee has an autonomous technical team divided into different areas: Evaluation and Institutional Projects, Graduate Courses Certification, Post-Graduate Courses Certification, Institutional Relations and Development, Administration Office, Expert Registry and Systems, and Library. Evaluation is carried out by *ad hoc* experts, organized in consultancies, advising committees and peer committees. CONEAU makes its decisions based on these evaluations.

The Committee is in charge of the evaluation and certification of all the graduate courses that are regulated by the State as long as their "professional exercise could directly risk health, safety, rights, goods or education of the inhabitants." (LES, Art. 43, my translation), according to standards set by the Ministry of Education. Certification processes begin when CONEAU calls for a certain number of courses to certify. After a certain period of time, certification becomes mandatory.

All universities must then start the certification process for regulated courses, which follows a series of pre-established steps. Phase one is self-evaluation, where each of the universities must write a report evaluating the situation of the courses under certification process. Then, the report goes to a peer committee, appointed by the Committee. After

making relevant observations, it reaches a final decision. CONEAU may decide to certify a course for 3 or 6 years, depending on the self-evaluation results and peer-evaluation processes. It may also decide to deny the certification, in which case the university would not be able to keep running the course in the current conditions.

It is necessary to point out that, from the onset, CONEAU was widely criticized by student and academic sectors of Argentine state universities. Big demonstrations against what was seen as a neoliberal reform took place during the passing of the Higher Education Act. The Committee was considered as another LES instrument that aimed at simplifying and adapting market demands to national universities' programmes and courses. Although many universities, such as the National University of La Plata, accepted LES and CONEAU from the beginning, CONEAU met with some resistance from most student unions. The University of Buenos Aires, National University of Comahue and National University of Entre Ríos started legal actions to avoid having to abide by some aspects of the new legislation. In the case of the National University of Buenos Aires, the court granted their request and since then it has been exempted, without limitation, from having to certify their courses before CONEAU. However, while some Faculties of the University of Buenos Aires reject the Committee's actions from time to time, others have voluntarily started the self-evaluation and certification process.

Due to the joint claim by our National Universities for having larger representation and weight in the decisions that are made, a serious modification of the Higher Education Act has been pending for several years. That modification will undoubtedly include changes in CONEAU's composition and functions. For this purpose, since 2006, several bills have been put forward in the Nation's Congress to replace the current Act (LES). Among these bills, we can mention Representative Pinedo's (PRO); Senator Giustiniani's (PS); Representative Donda Pérez (EPS); Representative Tate's (UCR); Representative Gutiérrez's (FPV). In all of these bills, evaluation appears as an instrument of educational policy conceived by the analysis of accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses in the universities' functions to carry out the appropriate corrective measures.

More recently, since 2010, a new bill has been in the Nation's Congress; this bill goes hand in hand with the National Education Act # 26206, passed by the Congress on December 14th, 2006 and issued on December 27th, 2006. In Chapter II, Title VI, this Act lays out the guidelines and regulating policies and processes of information and evaluation of the education system. Firstly, in Article 94, it refers to the state's main responsibility to develop ongoing and periodic evaluation of the system in order to make decisions aimed at

the improvement of the quality of education, social justice in the allotment of resources, and transparency and social participation. Different standards complement this central disposition in Articles 95 and 96. Article 95 states that:

> The main variables of the system functioning, such as coverage, repetition, opt-outs, graduation, final-examination exemption, overage students, socio-economic origin, costs and investments, learning processes and achievements, educational projects and programmes, teacher, administrator and supervisor training and practice, schools, socio-cultural contexts of learning and the evaluation methods themselves are object of information and evaluation.

Article 96, establishes that:

> The policy of information and evaluation shall be set by Federal Board of Education. Different jurisdictions shall participate in the development and implementation for the periodical educational system evaluation and information system, verifying it meets the needs of the community in providing educational equality and quality improvement. The Board will support and facilitate the self-evaluation of academic units with the involvement of teachers and other participants in the education community.

Finally, Article 98 establishes the creation of the National Board for Education Quality as an academic department for specialized counselling. This board requires the participation of qualified representatives from different teachers' organizations and of society, which will participate in spreading the criteria and evaluation methods, process control, and spreading and usage of the information generated by such processes.

Therefore, we can expect that in the immediate future, a new Higher Education Act will be passed as a result of the consensus of all the actors concerned with the teaching and learning processes.

2.2. Antecedents at the National University of Córdoba

The history of higher education in Argentina can be traced back to the birth of the National University of Córdoba. Its origins date from the XVII century when the Jesuits founded Colegio Máximo in Córdoba, where they taught philosophy and theology especially to religious members of the order. This school set the foundations for the future university. In 1613, higher studies began to take place in Colegio Máximo, under the Jesuits' leadership and the first steps of Bishop Juan Fernando de Trejo y Sanabria.

It was not until August 8th 1621 that the Pope Gregory XV granted Colegio Máximo the capacity of giving degrees. This was later confirmed by the Monarch Philip IV of Spain under the Royal Decree of Graces on February 2nd, 1622. In April that year, the University of Córdoba was founded. According to Buchbinder (2005), there are very few testimonies that may help reconstruct the concrete aspects of teaching in Córdoba during the first century of the University. However, we can state that, since its foundation, many academic reforms have been made at the National University of Córdoba, considering the passing of time and the socio-political changes that took place in Argentina and the world during the XVII, XVIII and XIX centuries.

During the XX century, the University of Córdoba developed an academic diversification process, where highly different growth characteristics from the XIX century can be easily observed. During the first years of the XX century, different Institutes and Schools were founded, many of which are the Schools that still conform the National University of Córdoba.

In this context, in the last few years there has been a marked trend to improve the quality of the programmes and courses offered by the universities. In the light of this policy, Higher Education Act # 24521, Section 3, Article 44: *Assessment and Certification* states that "university institutions must ensure the functioning of internal instances of institutional evaluation that will aim at analysing accomplishments and difficulties in fulfilling their functions, as well as suggesting measures for its improvement."

Along these lines, the Board of Education of the National University of Córdoba (HCS) decides to begin processes of institutional assessment through Resolution # 463/96, which in its first Article, determines to *"[...] implement and execute evaluation processes for academic quality improvement in all academic units in order to develop a General Programme of Institutional Education by the National University of Córdoba"*.

Also, through the HCS Resolution # 235/97, the *General Guidelines for Evaluation of the Academic Quality in UNC: graduate level* are passed; this resolution mandates that the different academic units build Evaluating Committees with the purpose of implementing evaluation processes in their areas.

HCS Resolution # 235/97 had as its legal antecedents, as well as current legislation, the following stipulations:

- HCS Resolution # 219/92, which requires the evaluation of University Teachers' Performance.

- HCS Decision # 7/93, which establishes the control, registry and evaluation of the National University of Córdoba teachers' performance.
- HCS Resolution # 275/93, which sets as a main goal for the UNC (in that academic period) the evaluation and, if deemed necessary, the reformulation of current systems of teaching and learning and/or plans of studies.
- HCS Resolution # 266/96, which orders to constitute the Committee that created the *Program of Institutional Strategies for the Improvement of Academic Quality*.

Abiding by the dispositions in the HCS Resolution # 235/97, in 1999, the Higher Education School of Languages, together with other academic units, submitted before the UNC's HCS their self-evaluation Report, carried out by an *ad hoc* commission. The different reports that each academic unit submitted were processed by the UNC Central Technical Team of the Academic Affairs Office.

On December 22nd, 2000, the *National University of Córdoba Graduate Education Self-Evaluation Final Report* is presented. In March, 2001, having met its Committees, the HCS acknowledged receipt of the Final Report without making any observations. During that year, preliminary contacts with CONEAU were started to sign the agreement to apply for an external evaluation. In 2002, by UNC Rector's Office Resolution # 792, CONEAU and UNC signed the *General Agreement to Implement the Process of Institutional Evaluation*. In this way, the UNC entered the final phase of what was defined as the *First UNC Institutional Evaluation.*

To illustrate the way in which the National University of Córdoba has gone through different processes of self-evaluation and external evaluation - as part of the call issued by the National Committee for University Evaluation and Accreditation of the University's degree programmes -, we can mention, on the one hand, the case of the Engineering Programmes in the Faculty of Exact, Physical and Natural Sciences, and, on the other hand, the Medicine Programmes, in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

As regards the Engineering courses, we must point out that during the academic year 2002, the first process of certification and evaluation comprised six programmes: Aeronautic, Civil, Electronic, Mechanic, Electrical and Chemical Engineering. In the second process, the programmes of Biomedical Engineering (2005) carried out their own self-evaluation. Computer Engineering defined the standards at the beginning of 2010 and started its first process of internal evaluation. The final determinations made by CONEAU established the certification of all 9 Engineering Programmes that went through the process for a period of three years with duties and recommendations. As a consequence of such

recommendations and of the different actions that were carried out to overcome the detected weaknesses, there arouse the Comprehensive Educational Quality Management System (Sistema Integral de Gestión de Calidad Educativa –SIGCE -, in Spanish), whose main objective was to conform an ongoing internal evaluation learning community, which would aim at improving the teaching quality of all fifteen graduate programmes of the Faculty.

More recently, on October 22nd, 2010, the Medicine Programme has been certified by CONEAU for six years through Resolution # 752. It is worth pointing out that as a result of the self-evaluation stage, the academic unit made an accurate diagnosis that allowed the Faculty to evaluate its ability to educate and the academic quality of such a Programme.

2.3. Antecedents in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba

Concerning the antecedents of the Faculty of Languages in the area of quality evaluation of the teaching and learning processes, and as we have already pointed out in the previous section of this chapter, in the National University of Córdoba specific environment, the start of institutional self-evaluation processes was decided by the Board of Education Resolution # 266/96, which, in its first article, determines "[…] to implement and execute evaluation processes for academic quality improvement in all academic units in order to develop a General Programme of Institutional Evaluation of the National University of Córdoba".

Through the HCS Resolution # 235/97, the *General Guidelines for the Evaluation of the Academic Quality in UNC: Graduate Level* are passed, and it mandates that the different academic units build Evaluating Committees with the purpose of implementing evaluation processes in their areas.

In April, 1998, according to the academic unit and the Central Technical Team of the UNC stipulations, the Higher Education School of Languages starts its path towards self-evaluation. The report that would be submitted a year later deals with the goals stated by the previously mentioned legislation and is done under the determination that "the self-assessment culture must be part of the conscience of the agents of university education not only as an academic duty but also as a moral one, since higher education has obligations toward groups and individuals that are part of a community, which supports them even if they are not direct participants (Source: Informe de Autoevaluación, Escuela Superior de Lenguas, 1999: 1 (Self-evaluation Report, School of Languages).

The report recognized specific limits, which had been set beforehand and which were justified on the basis that certain lines of research were not productive for the object of study: the fourteen graduate courses that were taught at the moment in the School of Languages.

Finally, the Committee that had taken care of the self-evaluation considered that "[...] an adequate efficiency and efficacy measurement methodology - in other words, quality measurement -, is a necessary requisite of ordinary practice in university management" (p. 2).

We agree with the Committee in that:

Every evaluation is positive if its main function lays in improvement and hence serves to the constitution of self-regulated institutions. Self-evaluation is, on the contrary, negative or indifferent if it is seen and executed as an unavoidable instance for the accomplishment of an independent evaluation that is required by law. (p.2).

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the humanist and qualitative approaches, the educational system is represented by an instance of cultural mediation between meanings, feelings and behaviours of society and the particular development of new generations. Thus, the necessity of interpreting and understanding, by research practice, social life representations capable of ensuring both comprehensive ongoing education and its adaptation towards society transformation.

(Da Silva, 1998: 92)

In the previous chapter, we presented the antecedents in the field of quality evaluation of the teaching and learning processes at university level in Argentina. We first made reference to the antecedents concerning the National System of Higher Education in our country and then we dealt with the antecedents at the National University of Córdoba and in the Faculty of Languages. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical framework within which this study has been conceived. Given that this work is about the evaluation of the quality of the teaching and learning processes implemented in the Chair of *English Grammar I*, this section starts by defining the terms *Educational Evaluation, Quality,* and *Teaching and Learning Processes*. Although educational evaluation has many models and approaches, not one single set of guidelines has been found that provides a comprehensive set of procedures for planning and implementing the kind of evaluation conducted in this study. Hence, the definitions of key terms will be followed by a description of those models, theories and/or approaches that have served to carry out this investigation.

3.1. Epistemological Considerations about the Terms *Educational Evaluation, Quality,* and *Teaching and Learning Processes*

Among the relevant concepts for this research, great emphasis is given to the terms *educational evaluation*, *quality*, and *teaching and learning processes*.

3.1.1. *Educational Evaluation*

No doubt, in the last few decades, educational evaluation, as a branch of educational science, has been a major contributor to the improvement of education quality. Educational evaluation has its roots in the classroom, in testing and assessing students. Although this activity is, of course, still important, in the last few years evaluation activity has expanded into the entire educational system (Hansen, 2009).

Educational evaluation is applied to find out learners´ achievements and diagnose educational outcomes, and plays a vital role in improving the educational quality. The reason for this is that it determines to what extent the methodological procedures implemented in the classroom are in line with students´ capabilities and how successful they have been at achieving the academic goals.

Bazargan (2006) states that educational evaluation involves the reflection of activities of a unit or educational phenomenon in order to push the predetermined goals forward. He holds that educational evaluation can respond to four questions:

1. How good is the educational goal quality?
2. How good is the syllabus quality?
3. How good is the quality of procedural issues for the predetermined schedules?
4. How good is the quality of schedule functions?

In defining the term *educational evaluation*, we will follow, in the first place, Stufflebeam & Shinkfield (1987: 183), who define it as:

> [...] the process of identifying, obtaining and providing useful and descriptive information about the value and merit of the goals, planning, performance and impact of a certain object, with the objective of following it as a guide in making decisions, solving problems of responsibility and promoting the understanding of implied phenomena.

We adhere to this definition of *evaluation* by Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, since it stresses its projection on the process, and not only on the result, its intention of being taken as a basis for making decisions on improvement and choice, of the answer to the needs, and quality improvement.

Educational evaluation has also been defined as:

> [...] the process directed towards determining systematically and objectively the appropriateness, efficiency, efficacy, and impact of all the activities considering their objectives. It is about an organizational process in order to improve the activities still in progress and help management to plan,

schedule and make future decisions. (United Nations, 1984, quoted in Villar Angulo & Alegre de La Rosa, 2004).

The emphasis on the *process* feature of evaluation intends to highlight that it is not about an external and separated fact of the project at stake, but about its own dimension. Likewise, evaluation has been characterized as:

A systematic medium of empirical learning and analysing the lessons taught for improvement of the activities in progress and encouragement of a more satisfactory planning through a strict selection among different possibilities of future action. This involves a critical analysis of the different aspects of the establishment and execution of a programme and its activities, its appropriateness, formulation, efficacy and efficiency, cost, and acceptability for all the interested parties (WHO, 1981, quoted in Villar Angulo & Alegre de La Rosa, 2004).

In this context, Cohen and Franco (1988: 67) state that "evaluation is about maximizing the efficiency and efficacy of actions that are addressed to modify sections of reality". Following this line of thought, Richards, Platt & Webber (1985: 98) define education as "the systematic gathering of information for purposes of making decisions".

Worthen & Sanders (1973: 19) argue that "evaluation is the determination of the worth of a thing. It includes obtaining information for use in judging the worth of a program, product, procedure, or object, or the potential utility of alternative approaches designed to obtain specified objectives".

Soler Fiérrez & González Soler (1974: 125) refer to educational evaluation as:

The integral, systematic, general and ongoing process, which aims at evaluating the changes generated in the student's behavior, the efficiency of teaching methods and techniques, the scientific and pedagogic process capacity, the adequacy of the curricula and programs of studies and everything that can impact on education quality.

Geli (2000: 187) suggests that:

Evaluation means collecting information about the processes and results of the education project, from beginning to end, analysing and interpreting it in order to take decisions related to the teaching and learning process as well as all the factors that impact on the quality of the educational processes in the teaching of sciences.

De la Orden, in Lafourcade (1977: 16) defines educational evaluation as:

A means that allows us to observe more precisely the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the structure, and the process and product of education. Its objective is to provide a prediction and control of the education process in as a detailed way as possible.

Nirenberg, Brawerman & Ruiz (2000: 157) understand *educational evaluation* as:

[…] a scheduled activity of careful thought on the action, based on systematic procedures of information collection, analysis and interpretation, with the objective of providing key and communicative critical appraisal about the activities, results and consequences... (of the action(s) under analysis), and making recommendations to make decisions that allow adjustment of the current action and improvement of future ones.

Brown (1989: 233) identifies *educational evaluation* as:

[…] the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within the context of particular institution involved.

According to the *Guidelines for Institutional Evaluation* (UNC) (1997), *evaluation* is a tool of transformation of universities and educational practices from the consideration of the institutional actions and results; the ultimate objective is the improvement of quality at universities.

In light of these definitions, we frame our research, on the one hand, within Stufflebeam and Shinkfield's definition of *true evaluation* (1987: 67), which consists of conducting "research designed to judge and/or improve the value or merit of an object". In this case, through the academic quality evaluation of the teaching and learning processes conducted in the Chair of *English Grammar I* of the English Department of the Faculty of Languages (UNC), we will try to provide all the subjects involved in this process with the necessary tools so that they can make decisions and justify them in order to correct and improve the evaluated situation. In this sense, we agree with Rodríguez Espinar, quoted by Apodaca & Lobato (1997: 39), that "the scientific practice of the evaluation consists in gathering evidence (objective quantitative and qualitative data) in a scientific way to make an informed decision".

Moreover, as we believe that evaluation should be used both to improve a programme or course of study and to judge its value, and since the aim of this work is

basically to provide knowledge and the basis for evaluation to make and justify decisions, it is our aim in this research to perform a formative evaluation, as (i) it is applicable to process evaluation, which will enable students and the system to have a better performance; (ii) it must be part of the functioning process as one of its actors; (iii) its aim is to improve the process being evaluated; and (iv) it enables to take measures immediately (Castillo Arredondo, 2002).

Educational evaluation as a "process" in education can provide valuable data for making decisions offering reliable judgement elements to the actors involved.

Along these lines, Astin (1996: 83) states that:

> Educational evaluation is a potentially powerful tool to help us design an education programme that is more efficient and effective, for it gives us strategies to improve the teaching and learning processes, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the programme in process.

According to Kells (1988), when "self-study" is carried out in a project or programme, it is not necessary to be compared to previously established criteria, as the intention is to describe and evaluate the project or programme antecedents, present performance and its plans for future improvement. The underlying philosophy is clearly a quality-improvement-oriented evaluation.

Glass & Ellet (1980) define *educational evaluation* as a group of theory and practice activities without a widely accepted paradigm, where there are a wide variety of models with very little agreement on the best way of evaluation.

On the other hand, educational evaluation as an expression is a very complex concept related to science and technology. *Technology* – conceived as "the type of productive techniques that incorporate scientific knowledge and methods into its design and development" (Quintanilla, 1991: 112) – suggests that the technologist has a problem that is closer to practice; the hypothesis stems from experience and the method applied is through trial and error.

Educational evaluation entails a specific way of knowing and relating to reality - in this case, the education reality - to facilitate changes of improvement. Usually, education evaluation is defined as a data gathering process aimed at passing merit and value judgement on an education-related subject, object or intervention. (Mateo, 1998). This process must be related to a decision making process with the purpose of improving or optimizing the object, subject or intervention evaluated.

Approaching to knowledge and practice in the world of education entails doing so in a reality with the same uncertainties, changes and alternatives as in education sciences. This provides education with complex characteristics, since it has to walk, theoretically and practically speaking, on the unstable and uneven surfaces of education activity and social change.

The inherent nature of evaluation is linked to a specific type of knowledge: the axiological one, for assessing usually and necessarily entails establishing a value for something; for this purpose, the mere evaluation data gathering is not enough; hence, we will need to interpret it, act with rationality, search for references, analyse alternatives, and develop non-simplified views of the reality evaluated.

Mateo (2006: 22-23) claims that:

> There is a paradox in evaluation that is not usually observed in other activities of knowledge: what makes evaluation concrete (assignment of value) is not what legitimizes it (the improvement of the object evaluated). It is this dual goal what actually provides evaluation with its own characteristic against other types of knowledge and what makes its activity so complex.

Therefore, we always have to bear in mind the continuity between these two goals, for an evaluation process that cannot assign the adequate corresponding values will not be valid; likewise, an evaluation process that does not trigger actions of improvement will lose credibility. To put it in another way, the evaluation action is inherent to the evaluation process; it is critical and it entails to offer non-simplified views of reality. In addition, it makes fact interpretation and a real and detailed diagnosis of the problem possible; in this sense, it involves not only the subjects evaluated but also the agents who perform it.

From the above, we can conclude that higher educational evaluation is a comprehensive and participative ongoing process that enables us to identify a problem, analyse it and explain it through the relevant data. As a result, it provides value judgements to make decisions. For this reason, we believe that evaluation process should not be an end itself; its results should have a real use and be an essential means to be more efficient and effective so as to make decisions that guarantee quality.

In other words, educational evaluation should be understood as an ongoing, permanent process enabling to gradually improve the quality of the object of study and not just as a section from which we can have full knowledge of the subject. Therefore, it

should incorporate a diachronic view, which, in time, enables us to value the improvements and achievements, identify obstacles and promote corrective actions.

To sum up, for the purpose of this work, we will narrow down the concept of *educational evaluation* by saying that it is an ongoing process through which teachers gather and use data from different sources in order to pass value judgements on the teaching and learning systems in general or on a particular aspect of it.

3.1.2. *Quality*

Education quality is probably one of the most frequent topics in any pedagogical discourse and, at the same time, it happens to be one of the most difficult to define or realise. Therefore, nowadays the general consensus is considering the concept of quality as relative, subjective, and value loaded. Paraphrasing Saint Augustine, we can say: "I know very well what quality is unless someone asks me about it".

In this regard, the debates about quality suggest that the task of defining *quality* in higher education is rather tricky due to the complexity of the matter (Sarriko et al., 2010). Fernández Lamarra (2007: 43) affirms that "regardless of the different conceptions of evaluation, all of them coincide with the fact that quality and excellence are the fundamental purposes pursued".

Etymologically, *quality* comes from Latin, *quálitas, -atis*, which is a derivation from the Latin word *qualis*; it indicates *kind* or *type*, thus having no value load. According to the dictionary of the Real Academia Española (2001) (Royal Spanish Academy), *quality* is "the property or properties inherent to something, which enable us to appreciate it as equal, better or worse than the others within a species".

In the field of education, the term *quality* seems to be historically linked to the building of *awareness*. In this context, Edwards Risopatron (1991: 16) defines *quality* as "a value judgement about the reality of education, which affects the reason of the education *existence* as long as it *can exist*". This definition of *quality* refers to what is desirable in education, and therefore to its future, but not as an abstract and de-contextualized *must*. Instead, it refers to reality as it is today, with all its possibilities and limitations; putting it another way, it refers to the starting point and condition from which what is desirable can progressively turn into a possible goal.

We agree with Toranzos (1996) about the fact that when it comes to defining *education quality*, there are three important and complementary dimensions. For these

authors, then, the content of the term *quality* can have different meanings depending on the dimension or dimensions of analysis under focus:

- Quality as *efficacy* implies that students learn what they should learn, that they achieve the established goals. This is shown in the learning results that have been effectively attained.

- Quality as *relevance* implies that contents respond appropriately to the subject needs in order to develop in their professional and social life. This dimension is shown in the educational action and its realization in the content and design of the programmes of studies.

- Quality of *procedures and means* offered by the system for the development of the education experience, which becomes clear in the conditions of the physical learning context, in the preparation of the faculty, in learning and working materials, in the didactic strategies used.

In general terms, from the perspective of philosophy of education, *quality* indicates characteristics that can be attained or that can be shown in different degrees, in relation to certain ideal parameters. For this science, *education quality* is "the degree of excellence in the accomplishment of acquisitions of the subject as an individual and as a member of a local, national and universal society through the education process. It is a normative concept that implies degrees of excellence and a constant relative position of merits" (Tesauro de Filosofía de la Educación, 1996).

De Miguel *et al* (1994) go beyond stating that *quality* is a relative concept, since: a) it means different things to different people, that is to say, there is diversity of interests among the people involved; b) it can imply different things for the same person in different moments and situations, depending on their objectives; c) it is a concept that can be defined either in absolute terms, considering it an ideal we cannot relinquish (just like truth or beauty), or in relative terms, and, finally, d) it is a slippery concept associated to what is good and worthwhile and one to which it is necessary to commit.

In the words of Cabo de Hoz (1985: 358), "an education will have quality as long as all the elements involved are oriented to the best possible outcome", while Laffitte (1992: 12) points out that:

> […] the quality of the education system entails considering aims/objectives, processes/means/results due to its close relation; it also entails taking into account the functionality or coherence of the general

purposes of education, institutional goals and specific objectives that establish guidelines for its actors, the efficiency or correct compensation between costs and benefits that indicate the processes and the organizational, personal and material means, as well as the efficacy of short, medium and long term education results.

Esteban & Montiel (1990: 75) define education quality as:

An action process or principle that does not exclusively aim at obtaining immediate/final results, but mainly, at building up, little by little, all that is necessary to achieve the best possible results considering what is asked from us and the real possibilities and limitations that we have.

García Hoz (1981: 10-11) considers that:

Quality of education is the expression of education that comprises integrity, coherence and efficacy. Integrity means that all necessary factors for the development of the individual are included in education; coherence is conceived as the need for each of the elements of education to have the importance corresponding to its role in human life; efficacy depends on the condition that all elements carry out their functions appropriately in order for each individual to develop their possibilities and overcome, as long as it might be possible, all kinds of limits.

Gil (1988: 270) believes that:

Whatever the model of interaction among the elements of an institution we defend, measured by whichever quality indicators we may choose, coherence, regarded as a factor linking those elements and their indicators, will always be a requirement for quality. Actually, the ultimate factor determining the education quality of an institution is not the individual consideration of its quality indicators, but the stability of the sense of cohesion existing between them.

In Coombs's words (1985: 147):

Quality is related to the coherence of what is taught and learned, with the degree of adaptation to the present and future learning needs of the specific apprentices, taking into account their particular circumstances and expectations. Besides, education quality requires us to include the features of the elements that comprise the education system: students, teachers, facilities, equipment and other means, their goals, curricular contents and educational technologies; we should also include the socioeconomic, cultural and political environments.

We believe that every strategy designed to increase the quality of higher education depends on the capacity to integrate, in a harmonic and differential way, the different

components involved in every educational action, including ethical issues. Thus, every attempt at improving teaching quality should take into account the context, processes and results. Therefore, every evaluation process requires the definition of quality and principle criteria that turn evaluation into an ethical, reliable and valid activity. In this regard, we agree with Rodríguez, quoted in De Miguel *et al* (1994), on the fact that the quality of universities is a relative and multidimensional concept related to the goals and actors of the university system. They should be analysed in the context of the social and political processes in which their goals and actors relate to each other.

Rodríguez Espinar, quoted in Apodaca & Lobato (1997: 24) states that:

Education quality cannot be understood if you ignore institutional, ideological and technical demands that stem from a conception of university which pays close attention to the reconstruction of scientific knowledge, to basic research and to the instruction of people who, in spite of their different backgrounds and expectations, want to take learning paths oriented towards professional training, and social and personal growth.

In order to analyse and monitor teaching quality of an educational institution, Aparicio Izquierdo (1991) offers an approach linked to teaching practice. Accepting the definition of the term *quality* given by the Real Academia Española (2001), understood as "the property or properties inherent to something, which enable us to appreciate it as equal, better or worse than the others within a species", he suggests carrying out comparative studies – or quantifications by means of some measuring pattern – that enable us to make judgements on teaching quality.

Among the essential aspects of quality, Aparicio Izquierdo considers the teaching results, and the teaching and the learning processes. Since teaching results are long term, the author considers that when people are practising their profession, it is more appropriate to evaluate immediate results, that is to say, evaluate the formative characteristics of students at the end of the educational process, since such results allow comparisons between the goals that have been set and those that have been reached. As a comparison criterion, he proposes analysing those results provided by educational research and pedagogical practice.

Tunnerman (2009: 274) explains that:

The issue of quality is nowadays a top-priority in university transformation processes, and it is part of the so called 'new academic ethos', which includes concerns about quality, adequacy, effective and transparent management, loyalty to substantial missions, and the exercise of a responsible autonomy.

Tunnerman also asserts that "the issue of quality appears as a significant social problem when the results or products obtained from the higher education institutions no longer fulfill the expectations of the different groups that take part in them".

Arríen (1995: 5-6) remarks that "quality is not as much in what is taught, as in what is learned; therefore, in real life, quality is more and more focused on the student". He also states that:

Education quality is a complex concept, built up taking into consideration multiple and various references; it is a rich concept, in permanent change, converging with and going after an ideal with a great force of attraction. Education quality is a kind of utopia and consecutive approaches.

Kent Serna (1999) states that the concepts of quality, evaluation and accreditation are recent in Latin-American higher education and, therefore, in Argentine university education. As a consequence, their introduction implies, in many ways, a revolution in the field of higher education. The author alleges that, unlike what happened in past decades, at present we find a society that criticizes university, a university that must give explanations to the external public, and an education system where actors traditionally excluded (under the concept of autonomy) now also participate in or, in some cases, even lead the change.

From the above, it can be can appreciated that the concept of quality is not an absolute concept, but a relative one. This concept implicitly includes the concept of appreciation or evaluation. In order to appreciate or evaluate the quality of an object, in general terms, it is necessary to do it by abiding by certain rules or standards that enable us to tell how much they adjust to certain patterns or role models.

Díaz Barriga (2006) points out that if quality is defined as the institutional capacity to show the increase of a series of indicators, through which authorities of institutions and programmes are required to provide information, an equation can be formulated: the better formal indicators, the better education quality. In other words, the concept of quality that drives the education system refers more to the formal characteristics rather than to the substantive academic processes.

Brunner (2000) states that it is the actors that participate in the force fields the ones who define the agenda of higher education quality. These actors are varied and have

different expectations, at times contradictory to one another, which makes something complex even more complicated.

In the same line, Fernández Lamarra (2005) suggests that for academics the idea of quality refers to knowledge; for employers, to skills; for society, to respectable and competent citizens; for the State, to efficiency, to costs and requirements of human resources.

Finally, we agree with Fernández Lamarra (2007: 41) who states that:

> Beyond the various concepts of quality, there is a definition proposed by UNESCO (Paris, 1998) that serves as a guide and synthesizes the spirit of other several definitions mentioned above; this definition points out that quality is the adaptation of the being and function of higher education to an actual "must be". In this way, the different aspects (Being, Function and Must be) can be related to the evaluation criteria to be applied to each of the institutional elements considered in the definition of quality. So, the mission, as well as the plans and projects stemming from it, will be evaluated regarding its appropriateness (Being); the functioning (Function) will be evaluated in terms of efficiency; and the achievements and results will be evaluated regarding their efficacy (Must be).

3.1.3. *The Teaching and the Learning Processes*

At the heart of the learning complex is the individual, the learner, in his unique individuality. In the transmitting of knowledge and its learning, the teaching of a subject or skill and its acquisition, the individual learner is both the subject and end purpose of the process.

One fundamental result that students persue in higher education is a learning opportunity through teaching. One definition of learning is suggested by Resnick et al (2010), who contents that learning is achieved through the acquisition and integration of a formalized process of instructing and organising experience within ranging forms of skills, knowledge ansd understanding which the learner will adopt later.

Learning can be understood as a constructive process in which learners acquire new knowledge and integrate it into individually existing cognitive structures. In the process, students acquire knowledge and skills on the basis that already exists. The teaching process, on the other hand, assumes that a basic understanding is established to these individual learning processes.

The recognition of the learner as an active, indeed driving, force in the learning process and the self-realization of his range of potentialities in that process is crucial for

reorienting education. Thus, the teacher should not be a narrow specialist but a knowledge-worker, a lifelong learner. In the perfection of the teaching process, the teacher and the learner should be partners, enquiring and exploring together.

Clifton & Nelson (1990: 143) affirm that:

> Evaluation involves a double process: teaching and learning. The teaching process attempts to develop the learning process and, therefore, determines it. But since both of them are parts of an interaction, the learning process experienced by the student determines the teaching process that the teacher is carrying out as well.

Following Litwin (1997), we understand the teaching and the learning processes as the set of didactic configurations, conceived as the particular way used by teachers to favour knowledge building processes. Here we include the processes of communication in the classroom, the negotiation of meaning deriving from the approach chosen by the teacher to deal with the multiple topics of their disciplinary field, the processes of learning by teaching and even the moral consequences of the act of teaching.

If we conceive learning as a process, with its progress and difficulties and even backward steps, it would be logical to conceive teaching as a process oriented to help students. Therefore, the assessment of the teaching process cannot and should not be conceived as separated from the learning process. Hence, we believe that assessment is never, strictly speaking, the assessment of *teaching or learning*, but rather of *teaching and learning processes*.

In this regard, Dochy & McDowell (1997), among other authors, express that teaching and learning are individual processes. This point of view is adhered by Gallagher (1999), who highlights that in the latest years the conception of the function of the student has been modified; they are no longer considered passive receptors of information, but apprentices that make decisions – *decision makers* – about what to learn and how to do it.

The training of students requires learning conditions that allow the command of the knowledge involved so that their aspirations will not be reduced to overcoming barriers to achieve the minimum accreditation criteria - even when demanding a great effort on their part -, especially when this effort does not coincide with the achievement of significant learning, but turns into a steeplechase or endurance test.

Both teachers and students can be involved in activities of a high academic quality, in which their interests, abilities and particular situations converge. The identification of

limitations and deficiencies in learning should not lead to simply classifying actors as bad students or bad teachers. Rather, this should be oriented towards planning alternatives that enable people to carry out teaching and learning with excellence.

Calero Pérez (2009: 99) claims that:

> Learning is based on the fact that the activity of individuals makes knowledge possible, constitutes it and is based on their previous knowledge. There is learning if knowledge is built through a dynamic balance, cognitive conflicts, accommodation and assimilation. Students do not learn the things they receive already done. They learn when given the chance to rebuild or rediscover the content or information.

The very same author states that every learning situation can be analysed through three components:

(1) Learning results: the assimilated contents.

(2) The learning processes: how those changes are produced; the mental activity of the person who is learning.

(3) The learning conditions: the kind of practice that takes place in order to trigger learning.

In Calero Pérez´s opinion, in order to promote satisfactory learning, teachers should try not to forget any of these three elements, since learning always implies results, processes and conditions.

Due to the nature of the human cognitive system, learning depends on the good functioning of certain processes that optimize or minimize its efficacy, increasing the possibilities of achieving changes that last and become generalized in the best possible way. According to Calero Pérez (2009), these auxiliary learning processes are:

- *Motivation*: In formal education situations, lack of motivation is usually one of the main causes of learning deterioration. For this reason, it is crucial to know which conditions favour the motivation process of students. Learning will only make sense when the knowledge or information to gain responds to the interests and curiosity of the student. If teaching meets that need, students will experience a high degree of motivation. Motivation entails the desire to do something consciously and implies two situations: that we be aware of the goals of the things we do and that we accept the results that we obtain. The deeper the awareness of the purpose or the goal to achieve, the higher the motivation.

- *Attention*: Due to the limited capacity of attention that humans have, it is important to prevent our attention from dispersing or distracting with other topics that are alien to our learning goal. In order to focus their attention, students have to be interested, and they will only be interested if they have an effective motivation.

- *Recovery and transference of mental representations:* If we learn a new behaviour and fail to recover it at the appropriate time, then, our learning will not have been effective enough. Thus, teachers must create new learning situations taking into account how, where and when students must recover what they have already learned. When we learn to use some knowledge or ability in various situations, the probabilities of transferring it to new contexts increase.

- *Awareness and control of learning mechanisms:* When motivation, attention, acquisition, recovery or transference are managed or controlled by teachers as they impose conditions to learning situations, the efficacy of that learning will notably increase. However, the aim is that students themselves, progressively, end up exercising control over their own processes, using them strategically, through the realization of the results they expect from their learning, the processes with which they can reach them and the more adequate conditions to start those processes up.

Thus, learning is not simply a one-dimensional intellectual activity, but involves the whole person (as opposed to only their mental process susch as thinking, remembering, analysing, etc.). Teaching, on the other hand, does not equal learning. The former does not necessarily lead to the latter; in other words, the fact that the first is happening does not automatically mean the other must occur.

Summing up, teaching and learning provided in higher education is not the same. Teaching is interpreted as any modification in information, behaviour, attitudes, knowledge, skills, capabilities or understanding that are restored and not subject to physical development or embedded behaviour patterns of the learner. Learning, on the other hand, is the result of teaching designed to bring about learning and where people acquire knowledge and skills on particular subjects and use such learned knowledge in different conditions.

3.2. Some Methodological Considerations

3.2.1. Needs Analysis

The design of syllabuses for language courses could only take place after a preliminary work on the learners´ needs. Being aware of the needs of the learners influences not only the content of the language course but also what can be exploited through such course. Needs analysis can help teachers eliminate the syllabus´s flaws so as to achieve educational goals.

The idea of focusing on learners´ needs originated in the 1970s resulting from the interest in the design of language courses that could satisfy individual and social needs (Palacios Martínez, 1994: 135).

Needs analysis is mentioned by Robinson (1990), Hutchinson & Waters (1996), and Jordan (1997), among other scholars, when saying that any approach to course design should start with some kind of analysis of target needs, present situation, language, etc. With the data obtained, it will be possible to formulate "general aims" and more "specific objectives" as intended outcomes. These specific objectives should realise the learners´ needs, and provide the basis for decision making in the study course.

Techniques and procedures used for collecting relevant information for syllabus design procedures are referred to as *needs analysis*. Needs analysis is a complex process which has to take into account what Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 54-63) define as "target needs", what learners need to do in the target situation – i.e. language use and "language needs", what learners need to do in order to learn – i.e. language learning. In a more modern view, we should not only take into account "target needs" and "learning needs" – i.e. objective needs – but also learners´ subjective needs, that is, their affective needs, such as their interests, wishes, expectations and preferences (Nunan, 1988).

Needs analysis is a vital part of syllabus design, as it helps to inform decisions concerning the formulation of both process and product objectives, and these, in turn, assist with the specification of syllabus content and procedures. We should remember, however, that needs should be regularly re-checked, and objectives modified as appropriate throughout the duration of the teaching programme. In this regard, Yarmohamadian (2007), points out that needs analysis involves gathering qualitative and quantitative data to find out the needs of a certain group of learners.

3.2.2. Summative Evaluation

Beretta (1992) makes the distinction between *formative* and *summative* evaluation, defining *formative* as a matter of improving ongoing programmes, and *summative* as determining the effects of a programme that has come to an end. Brown (1995: 225) suggests that summative evaluation "is usually characterized as occurring at the end of programme". Hence, given the nature of our study, the evaluation carried out in our investigation is essentially summative in intent and structure.

The purpose for gathering information in a summative evaluation is to determine the degree to which the programme was successful, efficient and effective. In this respect, Brown (1995: 226) stresses that a summative evaluation proves useful "if it can be viewed as a pause during which focus will be brought to bear on assessing the success, efficiency, and effectiveness of the program – at least to that point in time".

A summative evaluation, sometimes called outcome evaluation, is conducted for the purpose of documenting the results of a programme or unit of study. Thus, specific goals are identified and the degree of accomplishment of these goals are documented. The results of the summative evaluation might point to changes that should be made in a programme or course in order to improve it in subsequent implementations. The decisions that result from an evaluation of this kind generally cause sweeping changes and are fairly large in scale.

Regular self-induced summative evaluations can put a programme and its staff in a strong position for responding to any crises that might be brought on by evaluation from outside the programme. If summative evaluation is built into the curriculum and conducted on a regular basis, then up-to-date information will always be readily available and mechanisms will be in place for marshalling and assessing that information.

As a result, programme staff can meet outside evaluation requirements without feeling intense pressure, which means that the evaluation can be conducted with considerably more thought and care. In short, a programme that conducts periodic self-induced summative evaluations is in a much better position to defend itself from pressures from the outside world.

3.2.3. Participatory Evaluation

Participatory evaluation is an approach to programme evaluation. It provides for the active involvement of those with a stake in the programme. In other words, to be "participatory" means getting involved, taking an active part, and not just watching from the sidelines, "gaining benefit from the work carried out" (Alderson & Beretta, 1992: 38). In participatory evaluation, rather than powerless people who are acted on, students become an essential part in it, since their real needs are in some way recognized and addressed.

Fundamentally, participatory evaluation is about sharing knowledge and building the evaluation skills of programme beneficiaries. In this regard, the Institute of Development Studies (1998) states that "Participatory monitoring and evaluation is not just a matter of using participatory techniques within a conventional monitoring and evaluation setting. It is about radically rethinking who initiates and undertakes the process, and who learns or benefits from the findings".

Participatory evaluation is reflective and action-oriented. It provides beneficiaries with the opportunity to reflect on project progress and take corrective action and improve programmes. Besides, a participatory approach is empowering, since participating in an evaluation from start to finish can give stakeholders a sense of ownership over the results.

Conducting a participatory evaluation promotes participant learning and is an opportunity to introduce and strengthen evaluation skills. Active participation on the part of a teacher can result in new knowledge and a better understanding of their environment. This, in turn, enables participants to identify action steps and advocate for policy changes. In other words, it provides participants with tools to transform their environments.

In this context, participation occurs throughout the evaluation process including:

➢ identifying relevant questions;
➢ planning the evaluation design;
➢ selecting appropriate measures and data collection methods;
➢ gathering and analysing data;
➢ preparing an action plan to improve programme performance;
➢ reporting and disseminating results.

3.2.4. Reflective Teaching

English language teaching and learning are processes embedded within complex arrays of dynamic and socially interactive events. Early stages of reflective teaching begin with a classroom teacher´s desire to better understand the dynamic of a single language course as it is being experienced by a particular group of learners and their teacher.

According to Barlett (1997), the purposes of reflective teaching are three fold: (i) to expand one´s understanding of the teaching-learning process; (ii) to expand one´s repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher, and (iii) to enhance the quality of learning opportunities the teacher is able to provide in language classrooms.

In the words of Murphy, as cited in Celce-Murcia (2001: 500), to these ends, a teacher who is interested in reflective teaching takes steps to deepen awareness of teaching and learning behaviours by working to improve their abilities to:

- gather information on whatever is taking place within a language course.

- examine such information closely in an effort to better understand what they collect.

- identify anything puzzling about the teaching-learning process.

- build awareness and deepen teaching and learning behaviours.

- pose and refine questions tied to one´s teaching that are worth exploration.

- locate data and resources that may help to clarify whatever questions are being posed.

- make informed changes in teaching.

- continue such efforts over time and share emerging insights with others.

Richards & Lockhart (1994: 65) define reflective teaching as an approach to second language (L2) classroom instruction in which current and prospective teachers "collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about the teaching learning process".

Critical reflection can trigger a deeper understanding of teaching. Reflective teachers are capable of learning from, and further developing, their personal understandings and explanations of life within language classrooms. A rationale to support reflective teaching certainly lies on the fact that an integral part of reflective teaching is to learn to take action, when possible, on whatever we might be learning about ourselves as teachers and about our students needs, for the purpose of enhancing the quality of learning opportunities we are able to provide in our classrooms. For language teachers, taking action might involve exploring instrucctional innovations, trying out alternatives, and modifying – or even breaking – routines in teaching based upon what we learn.

According to Van Lier (1991: 79):

There is strong evidence that teachers can be researchers, that they can do useful research in cooperation with other teachers, with or without assistance from academically trained researchers, and that such research is a legitimate and beneficial activity for teachers. […] A reflective teacher or teacher-researcher is an *extended* or *autonomous* professional.

3.2.5. Evaluation Research

Suchman (1967, as cited in Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1987: 112) states that "an assessor must use any researching technique that turned out to be useful and plausible, according to the circumstances of each assessment". In order to carry out this work, the *Educational research* methodology, defined by Suchman as "the applied research whose purpose is to determine the extent to which a specific programme has reached the desired outcome and whose results will be used to make decisions regarding the future of that programme", was used as the main methodological strategy.

To quote Patton (1990: 115):

When one examines and judges accomplishments and effectiveness, one is engaged in evaluation. When this examination of effectiveness is conducted systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis, one is engaged in evaluation research.

Suchman considers that educational research consists of data compilation and analysis procedures that increase the possibility of proving, rather than securing, the value of some social activity. According to Suchman, the presence of an activity whose aims have some kind of value is a prerequisite for any evaluative study. He defines value as "any aspect of a situation, activity or object that has a particular interest, as being good, bad, desirable, undesirable or anything like it." Values, therefore, can be structured as ways of organizing human activity in principles that determine both the goals and improvement of programmes, and the means to achieve those goals.

Suchman opines that the evaluation process stems from, and returns to, the formation of values. This concept regarding the cyclical movement of the evaluation process emphasizes the strong interrelation existing between evaluation and nature, based on the value of planning and the operation of the programme.

Weiss (1982: 16) holds that "the object of evaluative research is to compare the effects of a programme with the goals that have been set for it, in order to contribute to the

decision making following the choice of that object, thus improving future programming." In other words, this type of research responds to the need of getting closer to the work in the classroom, not only to measure results, but also to explore which are the factors associated to them.

Regarding the current educational programmes, Weiss affirms that evaluative research allows the evaluation of the progress made and foresees new strategies. Such evaluation methodology performs, among others, the following functions:

(i) specifies the strong and weak points of programmatic operation and suggests changes and modifications in procedures and objectives.

(ii) examines the proficiency and efficiency of programmes in relation to arising needs.

(iii) suggests methods for planning and re-planning action programmes.

(iv) encourages the critical attitudes of the participating actors, involving them in the evaluation of their own work.

Therefore, the educational research of a programme of studies, carried out as a category of research in social sciences and viewed from the qualitative perspective, is understood as a substantive and compromised act whose purpose is to approach the issues and situations affecting a particular socio-educational context, so as to create or discover new theoretical elements and activate the necessary reins to put different actions that modify or transform the studied reality into practice. In order to do that, it is necessary to recreate an epistemological conception based on the qualitative aspect, which considers the subject in all their spheres of existence, as a subject that thinks, feels, plans, interprets, chooses and acts. In this way, the essentially active character that subjects acquire in an educational evaluation is revealed, because as constructors and actors of their own reality, they are entitled to participate in the research process and to know the results of such processes, in order to carry out the necessary innovations.

To sum up, educational research is a special type of applied research whose goal is to value the application of knowledge. By emphasizing usefulness, evaluative research must provide information for programme planning, its realization and development.

3.2.6. Action Research as a Theoretical-methodological Proposition and as Practice

In accordance with the educational research methodology described above, and in order to create a dynamic vision of all the processes involved, we also framed our work within the

action research approach. This technique allows us to understand how education research is conceived and carried out during the development of educational projects; it also shows us how it can contribute to the generation and consolidation of new learning that renews and transforms education practices with the creation and reassessment of cognitive and value elements of the actors themselves from self-reflection about their own practice.

Although not exactly new, action research is still (re)emerging as a branch of research in education and is gaining growing currency in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Action research can be defined as "systematic, rigorous inquiry by teachers into their own professional contexts" (Borg, 2009: 377). There are various benefits that teachers can accrue from researching their own practice while they focus their intellects, academic knowledge, and personal experience on conducting classroom-based research. In this regard, successful outcomes of engaging in research may include the development of research skills, increased awareness of the teaching and learning processes, renewed enthusiasm for teaching, greater collaboration with colleagues (Atay, 2008), enhanced self-efficacy (Henson, 2001).

It is assumed that most language teachers wish to develop themselves professionally on a continuing basis. There are a wide variety of methods of doing this. One method is by reflecting on interesting and / or problematic areas by structuring this process of reflection through the systematic collection and analysis of data. This is what *action research* (AR) consists in. Hence, the main function of AR is *to facilitate the reflective cycle*, and, in this way, provide an effective method for improving professional action.

The benefits of active and collaborative self-evaluation are probably maximised if teachers are able to participate in systematic action research into their own practice (McNiff, 1988; Edge & Richards, 1993; Somekh, 1993). Though action research may not suit all contexts nor all teachers, it still seems that there is a potential professional development spin-off in all formative evaluation activity (Easen, 1985; Roberts, 1993).

Jarvis (1991: 302) argues that whereas research is designed "to solve a problem – to come to understand", the purpose of a teacher´s research, or action research, is "to solve a problem – to make something work".

Despite many varying definitions of action research (Rapoport, 1970; Halsey, 1972; Elliot, 1981; Bogdan & Bicklñen, 1982; Ebbut, 1983), one common thread is that participants investigate issues considered theoretically significant in the field (Crookes, 1993; Burns, 2000). The sources of AR are located within "a great methodological revolution" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: VII) that has been taken place over at least the last

50 years in research in the social sciences and the humanities. It is part of a movement toward qualitative, interpretative, and participative research paradigms that expanded dramatically during the 20th century to contest the dominant positivist, scientific worldview that originated in the 15th century with the Enlightenment.

Action research was begun in the United States by Lewin (1946) in the 1940s as a means of addressing social problems. Although this approach was overshadowed in the United States for many years by psychometric research in the experimental tradition, it has been widely used for some time in England, Australia and Hong Kong. A number of action research anthologies as well as a great deal of the methodological guidance available have been published in general education (Kemmis & Mctaggart, 1982; McLean, 1995; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Oja & Smulyan, 1989). In recent years, however, several books and articles have been published about the use of action research in second or foreign language and education contexts (Nunan, 1990; Burns, 1998; Wallace, 1998).

The resurgence in educational action research in 1960s and 1970s was motivated by the mergence of curriculum as a field of inquiry. However, the burgeoning interest in AR in the field of ELT is essentially a phenomenon of the 1990s, since the argument was that curriculum evaluation should be an integral aspect of classroom teaching and learning (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Breen, 1985; Van Lier, 1988; Nunan, 1989). At this point, it is necessary to highlight that in Britain, during the last thirty years, action research has had a strong influence on pre-service and in-service teacher education and some influence on established educational research.

For Jordan (1997: 274), the main purpose of action-research is "to find solutions to problems and to enable teachers to improve aspects of teaching/learning". Bailey (1998: 3) states that "the broad goal of action research are to seek local understanding and bring about improvement in the context under study". Bailey, as cited in Celce-Murcia (2001: 496), claims that "one sign of professional maturity is the willingness of a field to critique its own work". She argues that there are good reasons for teachers to conduct language classroom research, as the process involved in data collection and analysis can help them discover patterns (both positive and negative) in their interactions with students. She adds that they can discover interesting new puzzles and answers, both of which can energize their teaching. By reading or hearing accounts of other people´s research, they can get new ideas for teaching and become better connected with the profession at large, and by sharing the results of their own research (at conferences, in publications, in staff room

lunch talks, and so on), they can get feedback from other teachers and learn from their experiences.

Elliot (1994: 88) defines this technique as:

The study of a social situation in order to improve the quality of action in it. Its aim is to provide elements that can be used to make practical judgement in concrete situations easier; the validity of the theories and hypothesis that it generates does not depend as much on true 'scientific' proofs, but rather on their usefulness to help people act in a more sound and efficient way.

Kemmis (1984, as quoted in Páez, 2007: 75-76), places the strategy within a socio-critical paradigm and defines it as:

A kind of self-reflection enquiry of participants (such as teachers, students or principals) in social situations (including the educational ones) to improve the rationality and justice of: a) their own social or educational practices, b) the understanding of such practices, and c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices apply (such as classrooms or schools).

Kemmis & McTaggart (1988: 2) describe action research as "a form of 'self-reflective enquiry' undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out". Kemmis & McTaggart (1988: 30) refer to the key points of action research:

1. Its aim is to improve action through change, and learn from the consequences of changes.
2. It is participative; people work for the improvement of their own practices.
3. Research follows an introspective spiral: a spiral of planning, observation, action and reflection cycles.
4. It is collaborative: it is carried out in groups by the people involved.
5. It creates auto-critical communities of people who participate and collaborate in all the phases of the research process.
6. It is a systematic learning process, oriented towards praxis (critically informed and compromised action).
7. It leads the researcher to theorize on the practice.
8. It requires that practices, ideas and suppositions be tested.

Therefore, action research implies a reflection that teachers make about the real development of their regular teaching practice, about what they expect and plan and what they really do.

Action research is a process of constant spiraling activity: action --- observation ---- reflection --- new action. In this self-reflection process, in which we try to deepen the understanding we already have about what is to be evaluated, we will have to gather the largest possible quantity of evidence and points of view. In this sense, it is essential to use different sources and information-gathering procedures, since the evaluation offered by different subjects are valuable elements of contrast.

Once the information has been collected, it is necessary to interpret it and assign it a value, which will force teachers to think about which of the evaluated aspects or dimensions could undergo modifications and innovations; to fulfill the improvement proposals that they consider could be introduced (as hypotheses of actions to be verified) and to design training programmes in order to apply them successfully as well as to reassess the results considering the possibility of modifying some of the actions undertaken or starting the process again.

Action research is not only a way of researching about teaching, but of understanding it. Action research entails understanding teaching as an ongoing research process because it considers that human interaction and social intervention (both essential parts of any educational practice) cannot be treated as mechanical processes, but should be treated as permanent processes of collective building. Consequently, action research is a way of understanding the teaching profession that integrates reflection and thinking to the analysis of the experiences that are carried out, as an essential element of what makes up the educational practice itself.

Action research is considered a path for professionals of the educational action to understand the nature of their practice and be able to improve it through sound decisions based on strict analysis and not from simple intuition, trial and error methods, or arbitrariness. In order to choose a course of action, it is necessary, from this point of view, to begin with a deep knowledge of a situation and its own changing characteristics.

Because of what has been stated above, the aim of this method of analysis is the improvement of practice taking a culture that is more reflexive about the relation between processes and products in concrete circumstances as a starting point, and breaking away from the rationalist assumption that practice can be limited to the application of theory. As Elliot (1994: 185) points out, "the movement of teachers as researchers tries to promote an

alternative tradition in research, generating a practical theory (in contrast to "pure" theory) and seeks to build a bridge between theory and practice".

In this regard, according to Carr (1995), action research is an active process whose centre of attention is the improvement of practices. That process is focused on the positive transformation of practices with the aim of providing means to translate it into actions; that is to say, it always aims at improving education, especially the learning and teaching processes, through analysis and optimization of the *educational practice*.

At this stage, it must be pointed out that action research, as an approach to integrating theory generation with practices, has a long tradition. Elliot (1988: 2) traces it back to Aristotle:

> Long ago Aristotle outlined in his Ethics a form of practical philosophy or moral science which involved systematic reflection by social practioners on the best means for realizing practical values in action. Aristotle called this form of reflection "practical deliberation".

Action research is a research methodology, not simply a means of supporting professional development. Wallace (1998: 16-17) states that:

> Action research involves the collection and analysis of data related to some aspect of our professional practice. This is done so that we can reflect on what we have discovered and apply it to our professional action.

This is where it differs from other more traditional kinds of research, which are much more concerned with what is universally true, or at least generalisable to other contexts. Thus, the important thing is that the processes involved are helpful to the practising teacher´s reflection, irrespective of whether they can be verified by someone else. The aim is not to turn the teacher into a researcher, but to help him to continue developing as a teacher, using action-research as a tool in this process. It is therefore more "user-friendly" in that it may make little or no use of statistical techniques.

In this respect, Wallace (1991) links *reflective teaching* with *action research*, arguing that action-research can be attractive for two reasons:

1. It can have a specific and immediate outcome, which can be directly related to practice in the teacher´s own context.

2. The "findings" of such research might be primarily specific, i.e. it is not claimed that they are necessarily of general application, and therefore the methods might be more free-ranging than those of conventional research.

Wallace (1991: 56-57) claims that "[…] research of this kind is simply an extension of the normal reflective practice of many teachers, but it is more rigorous and might conceivably lead to more effective outcomes".

The action research process is generally initiated by the identification by the practitioner of something which he finds puzzling or problematic. This puzzle or problem may, in fact, have emerged from a period of observation and reflection. The second step is the collection of data through a preliminary investigation which is designed to identify what is currently happening in the classroom without trying to change anything. Based on the review of the data yielded by the preliminary investigation, a hypothesis is formed. The next step is the development of some form of intervention or change to existing practice, along with a way of evaluating the effects of this change.

There has always been an opposition between "action" research and "real" research. Nunan (1992: 3) has defined research as "a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components: (1) a question, problem or hypothesis; (2) data; (3) analysis and interpretation of data." He claims that action-research incorporates these three elements and, therefore, qualifies as "real" research. For him, the salient distinction between action-research and other forms of research is that in action-research, the research process is initiated and carried out by the practitioner. Nunan adds that a further characteristic, perhaps differentiating AR from other forms of practitioner research, is that it incorporates an element of intervention and change.

Nunan (1992) is aware of the fact that there are those who argue that his definition of research as a systematic process of inquiry involving formulating a question, collecting relevant data, and analysing and interpreting that data is inadequate; that in order to count as research, the process should also meet the twin structures of reliability and validity. He does agree on the fact that any research needs to be reliable. However, he states that if one is not trying to establish a relationship between variables, but, to describe and interpret phenomena in context, the imperative to demonstrate that one has safeguarded one´s research from threats to internal validity disappear. He also argues that, by the same token, if one is not trying to argue from samples to populations, then it would not be unreasonable to assert that external validity is irrelevant.

Following Nunan´s theory, we should make it clear that in this particular study, as we are, on the one hand, just concerned with describing and interpreting phenomena in context, and, on the other hand, we do not aim at arguing from samples to populations, internal and external validity are not at issue.

3.2.7. Weir & Roberts's Model

As regards the model used in this work to evaluate the academic quality of the teaching and the learning processes in the Chair of *English Grammar I* in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba (UNC), we have followed Weir & Roberts (1994: 112-115), who propose and describe an evaluation model of the academic quality of an initial level course that is part of the curriculum corresponding to the English Teaching Programme for non-native speakers in a public and official institution in Paraguay.

The case described by Weir & Roberts, based on McDonald & Roe (1984) and Wallace (1991), shares most of the academic charcateristics and presents a large number of similarities with the educational context in which the course of study under focus in this investigation – *English Grammar I* - is taught. For this reason, we believe that out of all the models that we have analysed as potential candidates to base our research on, this is the one that best adapts to our reality and needs.

Hence, following Weir & Roberts, the following parameters or indicators have been taken into account to evaluate the academic quality of the teaching and learning processes of the study course *English Grammar I*:

1. Institutional aspects:

a) the historical and institutional context in which the programme or project is developed or the subject taught;

b) the explicit mission and objectives of the institution where the subject is taught.

2. The teachers:

a) degrees and academic antecedents;

b) experience as a lecturer in the subject;

c) individual staff academic responsibilities: division, assignment and degree of compliance of said responsibilities;

d) ratio between the number of students enrolled and the number of teaching staff;

e) basis of employment: tenured, occasional; full- or part-time;

f) teaching loads and presence on site.

3. The students:

a) characteristics of the students attending the subject: age, sex, etc.;

b) admission requirements: administrative and academic;

c) knowledge level at the beginning of the year;

d) knowledge level at the end of the year;

e) number of students registered; number of students who actually attended the subject (*en calidad de alumnos Regulares)*; number of students that attended the subject in good standing (como *alumnos Regulares)*; number of students that kept their good standing condition (*alumnos Regulares)*; number of students that finished the subject as extra-mural or external students (*alumnos Libres*) due to their low grades; number of students who dropped out during the academic year;

f) students´ attitude towards the subject.

4. Current Plan of Studies:

a) courses offered in the institution and their duration;

b) graduates' profile;

c) limitations and scopes of degrees;

d) description of the subject under study;

e) disciplinary contents of said subjects, as they are described in the Programme of Studies;

f) horizontal and vertical articulation of the subject under focus with other curricular subjects.

5. Current syllabus structure:

a) the organising principle(s) of the syllabus;

b) aims of the subject under study: relevance, efficacy and efficiency of the aims proposed in the syllabus.

c) degree of achievement of the aims proposed for the course;

d) analysis of the pedagogical model reflected in the aims of the syllabus;

e) degree of compliance in relation to the activities' schedule established at the beginning of the academic year and to the development of the stipulated disciplinary contents.

6. Studying materials:

a) the support available to students: coursebooks; sources for independent learning;

b) quality and availability of the bibliography used to develop disciplinary contents;

c) experience of teachers in materials design, gathering and/or selection.

7. Teaching methodology:

a) degree of effectiveness of the teaching methodology implemented in class: consistency between the methodological proposal suggested in the current syllabus and the one put into practice in class;

b) consistency between the methodology used in class and the aims expressed in the syllabus;

c) implementation of innovative pedagogical practices;

d) teaching time; workload on students: how reasonable, how realistic.

8. Formal assessment practices:

a) relation between the aims, contents and methodology of the subject and the assessment requirements and modes;

b) implementation of control methods to ensure the quality and the use of equitable and uniform assessment criteria that guarantee validity and reliability;

c) degree of compliance of the assessment schedule established by the chair and/or the institution.

9. Working atmosphere in the classroom:

a) teacher-student relation;

b) peer-to peer relation;

c) teacher-to-teacher relation.

10. Liaison or Inter-chair work:

a) the forms of liaison with other departments, areas or chairs.

11. Control of academic quality:

a) internal evaluation system(s) implemented;

b) external evaluation system(s) implemented.

CHAPTER 4
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical framework is the result of the selection of
theories, concepts and scientific knowledge, methods and
procedures that researchers require to describe and
explain objectively their object of investigation in its
historical, current and future state.

(Heinz Dieterich, cited in Angulo Rasco 2000: 81)

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework within which this study has been
conceived. We started by defining some key terms and moved on to make an account of
those models, theories and/or approaches that have served to carry out this investigation. In
this chapter, we first describe the participants in the investigation; then we make reference
to the methods and techniques used for data collection, and, finally, we refer to some
matters related to the implementation of such methods and techniques, and the analysis
procedures.

4.1. Subjects

Whenever an evaluation of this sort is carried out, the responses of the different participants
in the teaching and learning processes – students and staff – permit a correlation that adds
greatly to the reliability and validity of the outcomes of the evaluation. Regarding this
particular study, such correlation provided insight into the level of harmony, or
disharmony, of perceptions between the different participants in the teaching and learning
processes. The subjects that participated in this study were 250 students (222 females and
28 males) enrolled in the course *English Grammar I* and 4 professors (the Head Professor,
the Adjunct Professor, and two Teacher Assistants) in charge of conducting the teaching
and learning processes during the academic year 2010. The population was chosen at
random. The students were in the second year of their studies in the Faculty of Languages
and the majority of them ranged in age from 18 to 20.

4.2. Methods used for data collection

The data collection methods used in this study were:

(a) A written questionnaire-survey, including structured, semistructured and open-ended questions, which was answered by the students in order to obtain factual and non-factual feedback.

(b) A written questionnaire-survey, including structured, semistructured and open-ended questions, which was answered by the teaching staff of the Chair in order to obtain factual and non-factual information.

(c) Documents and records, which provided information on direct evaluation:

- Current Plan of Studies (Resolution # 32/89 HCS, UNC and Resolution # 1471/93, National Ministry of Culture and Education);
- Current syllabus for the subject *English Grammar I* (Resolution # 45/10 HCD Faculty of Languages, UNC);
- Didactic and/or bibliographic materials used to lecturing;
- Current syllabuses for the subjects that are horizontally and vertically related to *English Grammar I*: *English Grammar Practice*, *English Language II,* and *Phonetics and Phonology I* (Resolution # 45/10 HCD, Faculty of Languages, UNC);
- Statement of Faculty Roles and Responsibilities (Resolution # 114/04, HCD, Faculty of Languages, UNC);
- Examination Regulations (Resolutions # 216/03 & 394/10, HCD, Faculty of Languages, UNC. Resolution # 410/06. HCS, UNC);
- Regulations for Teachers in Training (Resolutions # 205/10, HCD, Faculty of Languages, UNC & 1140/10, HCS, UNC);
- Regulations for Student Assistants (Resolution # 31/02, HCD, Faculty of Languages, UNC);
- Mid-term exams and assignments during the period May and November, 2010;
- Teachers' Reports corresponding to the study course *English Grammar I,* 2010 academic year (Presnted in the Office of Academic Affairs of the Faculty of Languages);
- A written report of the Chair´s teachers´ meetings held during the academic year 2010.

(d) Records and database analysis: They were used to source information on various aspects of the course, namely learner enrolment, success and dropout rates.

4.3. Design and implementation of the data collection instruments used in this study

4.3.1. Some general considerations about the data collection instruments

Two questionnaire-surveys were designed: one for the students and another one for the teachers who taught the subject during the academic year 2010. Such tools were used to obtain feedback on different individual experiences from both teachers and students. The questionnaire-surveys allowed us to efficiently collect reliable data from a large number of subjects. Weir & Roberts (1994: 28-29) claim that "data from an adequately large and representative sample are needed to justify changes in the content or methodology of a programme".

Questionnaire-surveys are commonly referred to as "self-report" methods because information is obtained at second hand through informants´ accounts, rather than by direct "first-hand" descriptions such as test scores, documentary evidence, or classroom observation. King *et al* (1987: 72) state that "self-report data can be seen as the personal responses of program faculty, staff, and participants". Weir & Roberts (1994: 28) claim that questionnaires "can elicit reactions to both course content (aims, objectives, materials) and methodology".

There are several reasons that justify the choice and design of this instruments: first, this tool contained questions about the main elements under analysis for this study; second, special attention was paid to what both learners and teachers considered as the students´ basic needs and how these needs could be satisfied; next, questionnaires asking about different individuals´ experiences within a programme enable one evaluator to collect information efficiently from a large number of people. In this respect, Lynch (1996: 134) states that "questionnaire-surveys are a time-efficient means of gathering data from a large number of people". Furthermore, he claims that "because one set of questions is being asked, we can be assured of obtaining roughly the same kind of information across the various questionnaire respondents, and, as a result, questionnaire data are easier to analyse for patterns that data acquired by less structured tecniques". Finally, evaluators cannot provide a comprehensive account of a project or programme on their own. They need the accounts of insiders (learners, teachers, education authority officers) because they need to elicit "insiders" experience of events to verify their descriptions. The perceptions of participants, however subjective, are a crucial means to understand programme implementation and effects and are only obtainable by this kind of method.

The researcher designed the questionnaire-surveys by generating a list of items, which solicited the students´ and teachers´ responses on different aspects of the teaching and learning processes (teaching and learning strategies; instructional techniques and methods implemented in the classroom; the teaching/learning environment, etc.). The items in the questionnaire were derived from literature and the researcher´s experience in the field.

The questionnaire-surveys were introduced as a strategy that enabled us, on the one hand, to distinguish objective data or information from subjective attitudes or opinions; it also allowed to gather information on a wide and varied spectrum of indicators and variables. On the other hand, we could observe results in an objective way and make generalizations as well as organize and classify information according to previously established categories.

4.3.2. Some specifications about the students´ questionnaire-survey

262 students answered the questionnaire-survey nearing the end of the academic year 2010. At the time the questionnaire-survey was administered, they had already sat for the term tests and the make-up exams set up for the school year. As stated above, the main purpose of this instrument was to identify the students´ perception about the grammar course they had taken. As the questionnaire-survey was administered on a day when practically all learners were present (all students had to attend classes that day in order for the teacher to give the results of the make up exam and/or sign their reportbooks as *students in good standing (alumnos Regulares)*, the response rate was high. Thus, practically all students submitted their answers; only twelve questionnaires had to be discarded due to the fact that they were rather incomplete, for which the final sample comprised 250 questionnaire-surveys.

The questionnaire-survey was designed in such a way that each learner could answer the questions individually. To prevent the students from feeling embarassed when being asked directly about their opinion on the course, the questionnaire-survey provided the security of anonymity. In this way, we wanted to ensure that the learners would feel that they could freely voice their views and respond to all the items in all honestly. Consequently, the subjects were assigned random identification numbers.

When designing the instrument, we looked for simplicity of design and clarity of wording. We worked hard so that the instructions would not be ambiguous for respondents to understand exactly what was being asked of them. It was necessary to make a clear differentiation between instructions and questions and extra care was taken so that the answer to a question would not be influenced by its position in relation to other questions, nor by the content of preceding questions. Although the questionnaire-survey was rather long, this apparent weakness was consistent with the need to obtain target data.

The questions were arranged in such a way that cooperation on the part of the respondent could be maximized. Readily answered questions were put first, whereas open questions were placed at the end. As this group of students had already taken *English Grammar Practice* in first year and were finishing their second course in the field of English grammar, they had a more or less extensive experience in studying the discipline, which allowed most of the subjects to give full answers on the different methodological aspects under focus.

As regards the structure of the questionnaire-survey, it was divided into six clear sections. In the first section, we intended to gather factual data about the learners, which included information about their age, sex, the Study Programme they were enrolled in and the starting date; the amount of time they devoted to studying the course contents out of the classroom setting; their opinion about the amount of time alloted to the teaching of the course contents; their percentage participation in class; their previous knowledge of the course contents; people and strategies that they had resorted in order to solve problems that might have come up during their learning process.

In the second section, students had to answer – by stating "YES" or "NO" - a number of questions related to the syllabus, the course contents, the schedule of activities, the teaching-learning methodology implemented, the assessment methodology and criteria, the roles held by the Chair staff, and the obligatory and recommended bibliography.

In the third and fourth sections, by using a Lickert scale, we sought to collect data about different aspects of the teaching and learning processes implemented during the academic year. Section 5 aimed at collecting information about the major difficulties they had encountered during the school year concerning the development of the teaching and learning processes. To fulfil this purpose, students had to choose five items which described different possible difficulties out of fifteen that were included. 10 open questions were added in the last section to be answered in an evaluative way and to allow

students to dwell freely on their impressions and views of the process of studying *English Grammar I* in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba.

As to the close or structured questions, they were oriented to getting answers in terms of pre-determined or pre-structured categories from subjects, which eventually enabled us to obtain frequency scales, comparing and obtaining statistic information through the collected data.

The open-ended and semi-structured questions were of a descriptive-exploratory nature and were oriented towards discovery; that is, the intention was that surveyed subjects described attitudes and behaviours in a deep and detailed way. In other words, by including this type of questions, we could obtain richer, more divergent information that was not limited to the areas pre-determined by the evaluator. These data provided the researcher with the descriptive categories for more structured responses in the questionnaire-survey proper.

In the case of the students´ questionnaire-survey, following Bell´s (1987: 58-60) and Patton´s (1987: 118-120) taxonomies of questions, 6 different types of queries were included:

- *Estimation questions*: the answers had different intensity levels, and the respondents had to choose a position in the scale. For example:

Rate, according to the qualification scale from 1 (lower level) to 5 (higher level) the following aspects of the teaching and learning processes implemented during this academic year:

- Complexity of exams.
- Quality of the systematized didactic material used for teaching and studying the subject.
- […]

- *Questions regarding facts or actions*: they referred to concrete or comparable facts, events or actions, whose answer was *YES* or *NO*. For example:

Please, answer YES or NO to each of the following statements:

- I was informed about the activities schedule (disciplinary contents to be developed in the first and second four-month period, dates of exams, etc.) stipulated for the complete academic year.
- The objectives of the subject were explicitly stated.

- The assessment methodology to be implemented during the academic year was made explicitly stated.

- […]

- *Opinion or intent questions*: the subjects were asked, in every case, to give their opinion about a particular aspect of the teaching and the learning processes implemented during the development of the course. For example:

- Which disciplinary contents were, in your opinion, more interesting or useful? Why?

- Which changes would you suggest to improve the academic quality of the teaching and the learning processes implemented in this course of study?

- […]

- *Questions regarding feelings*: in this case, the questions were aimed at exploring the sensations of the respondents about the relations established in the classroom. For instance:

Rate, according to the qualification scale from 1 (lower level) to 5 (higher level) the following aspects of the teaching and learning processes implemented during this academic year:

- Working atmosphere in the classroom.

- Commitment level of the teaching staff in relation to the teaching and learning processes.

- […]

- *Questions regarding knowledge*: in this case, factual information was required; the quality of the answers depended on the degree of knowledge that the subjects had about different and varied objective aspects directly related to the quality of the teaching and the learning processes. For example:

Complete with personal information or mark with an X, as appropriate, the correct option(s) in each case:

- *Age:*

18 - 20 years

21 - 24 years

25 years or more

- *Gender:*

Male

Female

- *Programme(s) the student is enrolled in:*

English Teaching Programme

English Public Translation Programme

English Language and Literature Licentiate Programme

- *Questions regarding experiences and behaviours*: they were related to different techniques and/or strategies put into practice in the classroom that aimed at improving the learning and the teaching processes. For example:

- What learning strategies did you use to study the different theoretical and practical contents of this course?

- Were you able to make any connection between the contents studied and learned in *English Grammar I* and those you studied and learned in *English Grammar Practice*, *English Language II* and/or in *Phonetics and Phonology I*? If the answer was *no*, could you name the reasons why you were not able to make any type of connection between the contents taught in those courses?

- […]

As regards the procedure we followed before the questionnaire-survey was answered, we first explained the objectives as well as the way in which each item had to be assessed or interpreted. The necessary clarifications were also provided for queries that might have arisen. The maximum allotted time to answer the questionnaire was forty minutes.

A fundamental requirement for the students to answer the questionnaire-survey was that they had to be enrolled in the course as *Students in good standing (alumnos Regulares)* during the academic year 2010.

4.3.3. Some specifications about the design and implementation of the teachers´ questionnaire-survey

As to the teachers´ questionnaire-survey, it was divided in two sections. In the the first section, we sought to gather data about the posts held by the staff of the Chair as well as their academic background. The second section comprised six sub-sections, which aimed at collecting information about the teaching and learning processes developed during the academic year 2010. A number of open-ended, as well as structured and semi-structured questions - with the same characteristics as the ones designed for the students´ questionnaire-survey - were included so that the researcher could obtain enough information to evaluate later on the quality of classroom practices. It is worth mentioning that all the questions asked were related to the indicators pointed by Weir & Roberts (1994), which have already been described, for the evaluation of the academic quality of the teaching and the learning processes (See Chapter 3.2.7).

The questionnaire-survey was administered in late November, on the day the final examination for the subject took place. The questionnaire-survey was answered *in situ* in order for the researcher to be able to clarify any inconvenience that might arise. The subjects took approximately thirty minutes to answer the questionnaire. A fundamental requirement for the teachers to answer the questionnaire was that they had to have actually taught the subject in the academic year 2010.

4.3.4. Some geenral considerations about documentary observation

Pace & Friedlander (1978: 3) claim that evaluation is "the process of identifying and collecting information through different methods to help decision makers choose among available alternatives". In this regard, another technique that proved quite useful for the purposes of our investigation was the documentary observation, which enabled us to do both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis of the information.

A document is a written text and artefact having an inscribed text with its core feature produced by individuals and groups during their everyday practices and geared exclusively to their practical needs (Corti, 2011). The investigator must be conversant with the origin, aim and audience of the documents he wants to analyse (Grix, 2001). Documents are not produced purposely for any subsequent research; yet, they are happening objects with a solid or semi-solid existence that give direct as well as indirect

information (Payne & Payne, 2004). In this regard, Corti (2011) alleges that Documents not only help provide details but they also establish and reaffirm the reliability of other collection sources.

By means of examining different documents, we were able to have access to different units of analysis, which resulted in a detailed descriptive study of different categories of analysis that turned relevant to our research work. As Patton (1987: 90) points out, "program documents can give the evaluator basic information concerning the activities and process of the program and can suggest important evaluation questions to be persued in greater detail […]".

It is worth pointing out that the range of data collection instruments employed increased the reasercher´s ability to examine the nature and frequency with which certain variables occurred in the research setting.

4.3.5. Some specifications on the implementation of the data analysis procedures

Even though we admit that, generally, the codification of open-ended questions is more difficult and implies a greater demand of time to both the researcher and the respondent, we were convinced that the possibility of being able to configure a database characterised by its comprehensiveness and completeness would grant more information to the researcher and more freedom to the respondent. This was corroborated when we carried out the analysis, de-codification and classification of the collected information. In this last case, since subjects were given absolute freedom to answer the open-ended semi-structured questions included in the instrument, a hard and particular work was required on the part of the researcher. Such work implied:

- Building up new categories and proceeding to their codification.
- Analysing the ideas involved to highlight the most relevant ones.
- Working carefully so as to avoid handling data and making the results unreliable.

We wanted to make sure that the instrument met the requirements of validity, reliability and practicality, that is, to prove that (i) the questions related directly to the aims of the study; (ii) the questions found out about learners´ needs and perceptions, (iii) the questions were simple, accessible, answerable, clear and unambiguous. Thus, after designing both questionnaire-surveys they were validated.

The face validity of the instrument was ascertained by presenting the questionnaire-survey to a group of referees in the area of *Curriculum and Instruction* from the Faculty of

Education of the National University of Córdoba. The experts made some observations and recommended making some modifications on the items.

Besides, in the case of the students' questionnaire-survey, it was also validated by means of a pilot test (implemented in September, 2010) completed by 20 students randomly chosen; in the case of the questionnaire-survey to be answered by the teachers, the tool was tried with three teachers who had been part of the Chair in previous academic years, but who, for different reasons, were no longer part of it. Besides, the Thesis Supervisor evaluated the tools acting as an expert judge. In both cases, the pilot tests were conducted in order to assess the clarity of instructions, anticipate difficulties in the questions and prove whether the instructions led to obtain the required information in the analysis of the collected data.

Weir & Roberts (1994: 138-139), assert that:

In all methods, the value of piloting instruments before actually employing them in final data collection is paramount. The biggest single threat to the reliability and validity of a study occurs when insufficient attention is paid to the design and piloting of evaluation instruments.

Davies (1992: 208-209) claims that:

All too often attention is concentrated on the actual collection of data and their analysis. Sufficient time and attention must be allocated to the refining of evaluation instruments. They at least need to be tried out first on colleagues and then preferably on a small sample from the intended target group of informants. This will help identify ambiguities, other problems in wording, and inappropriate items, and provide sample data to clarify any problems in the proposed methods of analysis prior to the collection of data in the study proper. Piloting is a crucial stage to iron out faults. It is not possible to recover from errors once it has been filled in, as it is an unrepeatable opportunity. Piloting should be done with a small sample of the real population. Piloting allows us to see whether the method of collecting data is suitable and whether the questions are adequate in terms of clarity, and so on.

After the questionnaire-surveys were piloted, some problems were detected, which allowed us to make some modifications in the designed tools and obtain more accurate indicators. For example, the instruments contained some items whose answers proved to be uninformative. Besides, there were some items that were repeated in different words, whereas there were some key questions missing.

Krueger & Casey (2000) opine that effective analysis has to be sequential, continuous, and verifiable. In so doing, it will increase the degree of consistency, dependability, and quality of the collected data (Secker et al., 1995).

Once the information had been gathered, it was systematized, classified, analysed and interpreted. The raw quantitative data were summarized in tables and represented in graphic form. The data collected was condensed by converting numerical data to percentages. As a first stage, the raw data were mapped onto summary sheets and then converted to percentages. The data were tabulated in a simple manner, using layman terminology.

It is worth noticing that some sections of the questionnaire-surveys were designed using *Lickert* scales. These scales described various positions that respondents had to adopt in relation to certain aspects and select one of several possible answers, which implied a weighted judgement. These scales were included as instruments designed to measure the attitude of the surveyed subjects, regarding their position to answer in a favourable or unfavourable way about a certain object. Those attitudes should be considered as symptoms (and not as facts), which implied that they could have different properties, such as direction (positive or negative) and intensity (high or low).

Davidson (2007: 5) states that we should "weave the findings together to create a cohesive answer to a real question". This weaving of findings is known as *triangulation* and is standard professional practice in both the field of applied social sciences and the field of education. Triangulation implies using different types of data and from different sources, the purpose of which is to get different perspectives on the answer to the same question.

On the same lines, we should also point out that this investigation was a mixed study, since it was about a process in which the researcher gathered, analysed, and linked quantitative and qualitative data into one single study in order to answer one problem (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Gresmel, 2005; Mortens, 2005; Williams, Unravy & Grinnel, 2005, quoted in Hernández Sampieri; Fernández & Baptista, 2008). In this regard, Tunnerman (2009: 280) states that:

> Evaluation does not only consist of storing, processing, and presenting data; on the contrary, it implies a more complex process of building value judgement on the relevant aspects. For that reason, evaluation should rely on the use of both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The qualitative and quantitative dimensions of data need not be isolated from each other, and can be complementary. Lett & Shaw (1986) believe that the diversity of language teaching strategies used at the university level in particular invites both qualitative and quantitative types of evaluation, as both of them can be utilized with a view to defining a programme, and, as such, are better described as programme-formative evaluation strategies, which may provide alternative views of the same classroom phenomena.

Sometimes quantitative data are not sufficient as evaluation findings, and, consequently, qualitative data are required in order to be able to interpret them. As Crombach (1982) has observed, it is not adequate or desirable to try to compress educational outcomes into a single dimension of measurement. Qualitative methods are often closely associated with naturalistic inductive designs and are guided by a search for patterns rather than by hypothesis (Patton, 1987: 15). They are normally exploratory, descriptive, and discovery-oriented in purpose. They try to describe sets of behaviour in depth and detail. They can provide information on how teaching and learning processes actually take place and what they mean to participants.

Quantitative methods, on the other hand, normally rely on constraining people to respond in terms of fixed response categories. Quantified data tell us the frequency with which certain responses are adscribed to the sample under review and allow us to determine whether these frequencies are reflected in subsamples within the data set – i.e. the extent to which people differ in respect of specific pre-determined critical variables. Patton (1987) states that the advantage of a quantitative approach is that it measures the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. This gives a broad generalizable set of findings.

Taking into account what has been discussed above, and with the aim of overcoming the limits that may derive from the application of only one research method, an intra-method triangulation was performed, since, through the use of various data collection instruments and the field work carried out, we linked the quantitative and qualitative methods on the same object of study (Cortada de Kohan, Macbeth & López Alonso, 2008).

It is worth highlighting that the importance of using both research methods lies on the possibility of providing a better validity of the results. Although in this particular study these methods were implemented independently, both of them focused on the same section of reality. Hence, we collected data through different sources, such as students, teachers,

documents, and records, with the aim of introducing both methods to the analysis of the same object of study. According to Angulo Rasco (2000: 105), triangulation with subjects is *essential* because it is mainly addressed to the credibility of the research. Furthermore, a combination of data sources is likely to be necessary in most evaluations because often no one source can describe adequately such a diversity of features as is found in educational settings, and because of the need for corroboration of findings by using data from these different sources, collected by different methods and by different people.

As we have already stated, there are several advatages of using multiple approaches for a research (Simovska & Carlsson, 2012). Among such advantages, we can mention the following ones: (i) the researcher can obtain a variety of data and information on the same research topic; (ii) the reseracher can make use of the strengths of every approach; (iii) the researcher can reduce the effects and limitations of a single approach, (iv) the researcher can achieve a higher level of reliability and validity of the results.

Angulo Rasco (2000) claims that the principle of *methodological humility* is conducted in three ways through this type of triangulation. The first way is the *epistemological*, since it is confirmed that one of the interpretations is the researcher's, but it is admitted that it is necessary to know other points of view; mainly, that of the participating subjects of the situation being researched. The second way is the *technical* because it allows adaptation of the techniques to the characteristics of the researched situations and avoids the introduction of the researcher's own concepts and categories. The third way is the *ideological*, as validating directly with the subjects involved in the research has an emancipating effect.

On the other hand, in accordance with the objectives of this study, we worked on the basis of a descriptive research, since we collected data that was later systematised and, finally, somehow the properties or characteristics of a certain population were assessed, in order to describe facts/actions in detail.

Patton (1987: 169) claims that:

> A consensus has gradually merged that the important challenge is to match appropriate methods to evaluation questions and issues, not to advocate universally any single methodological approach for all evaluation situations […] evaluation has moved into a period of methodological diversity with a focus on methodological appropriateness […] Today´s evaluators must be sophisticated about matching research methods to the nuances of particular evaluation questions, the idiosyncrasies of specific program situations, and the information needs of identifiable stakeholders.

Mixed method approaches work from the assumption that all methods have particular strengths and all methods are flawed in some respects, thus using different methods allows the researcher to make maximum use of the strengths of each while striving to overcome the weaknesses of each method. It is worth pointing out that the triangulation of data, both through the use of different instruments, methods and techniques, and different types of informants, worked fairly well in our study, and allowed us to claim that account was taken of the variety of different perspectives and thereby to have greater confidence in the results, as is highlighted in the following quotation by Cohen & Manion (1994: 234):

> Firstly the researcher needs to be confident that the data generated are not simply artifacts of one specific method or collection. This confidence can only be achieved when different methods of data collection yield substantially the same results. Furthermore, the more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher´s confidence. If, for example, the outcomes of a questionnaire survey correspond to those of an observational study of the same phenomena, the more the researcher will be confident about the findings.

CHAPTER 5

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT PLAN OF STUDIES

AND THE SYLLABUS OF *ENGLISH GRAMMAR I*

> If language programme personnel – principles, directors of
> studies, head tecahers, and teachers undertook their own
> internal evaluations, not only would their programmes
> benefit from the information gained, but the bureaucrats
> would be less likely to impose their own.
>
> (Mackay, 1994: 144)

In the previous Chapter, we refered to the participants in this study; the materials used;
and the piloting, data collection and analysis procedures. In this Chapter, we will confine
our attention to the analysis and description of the current Plan of Studies as well as the
course syllabus. We will also refer to the structure of the Chair of *English Grammar I*, the
academic record of the teaching staff and their roles and duties.

5.1. Analysis of the current Plan of Studies

5.1.1. Brief outline and description of the current Plan of Studies

In 1986, through Internal Resolution # 131, the Director´s Office of the then School of
Languages created a committee that was assigned the job of making the projects of the
new curricula designed in 1985 by the different language sections. This committee based
its work on a proposal made by students and on a wide consultation made not only to
teachers working at the institution but also to teachers and researchers from other Faculties
from the National University of Córdoba, (UNC), who made interesting and valuable
contributions through the presentation of reports and lectures. The School of Languages
also relied on advice given by the University Affairs Office from the Ministry of
Education and Justice.

   The central core of the project of this new plan was the study of language as a socio-
cultural object, considered as a medium of thought, and as a free and purposeful cognitive
activity and system of the human being; this new plan envisaged a graduate's profile that
contemplated not only the possibilities of access to higher education but also an effective

professional and social insertion in their specific working sphere. Its development required a thorough revision of the objectives, contents and methods used for training teachers, translators and researchers.

The first proposal of the Committee was submitted to the University Rector's Office on November 5, 1986. That proposal was modified several times due to the observations timely made by the Office of Academic Affairs of the UNC, which led to new consultations in the heart of the School of Languages.

A Committee appointed *ad hoc* by the Academic Board was in charge of the final revision; the result of its work is the Plan of Studies described below, which was approved by Resolution # 32/89 of the Higher Education Council of the UNC. On July 6, 1993, by Resolution # 1471, the National Ministry of Education made the degrees of *English Language Teacher*, *English National Public Translator* and *English Language and Literature Licentiate* nationally valid.

5.1.2. Objectives of the current Plan of Studies

The Faculty of Languages sets in its current Plan of Studies (Plan de Estudios N.º 7) various objectives stemming from its object of study: language is conceived as a free and purposeful activity of human beings. This is concomitant to its teaching being understood as something dynamic and creative; as a means of thought and as a cognitive activity. This implies that its study is, at the same time, interdisciplinary and intercultural; as a cultural object, in its double function of synthesis and of analytic expression of a certain reality; as a system, which means that it should be taught as a whole whose parts cannot and should not be isolated.

In accordance with this object of study, the academic objectives of our institution are the following:
(i) to teach the language;
(ii) to teach to reflect on the language, according to the different problems that arise from it.

The first of these objectives has, at the same time, three secondary objectives:
(i) to teach to use the language;
(iii) to teach to teach the language;
(iii) to teach to translate and interpret the language.

5.1.3. Degrees conferred in the English Department: competencies and scopes

(i) *English Language Teacher*

An English Language Teacher can plan, conduct and assess teaching-learning processes in the areas of English Language and Literature, in all levels of the education system. He can also elaborate, direct, implement and supervise programmes to train adults in the field of English with specific purposes.

(ii) *English National Public Translator*

An English National Public Translator can translate texts and documents of a public or private nature from English into the national language and vice versa, in the cases in which legal regulations state so or upon request of the interested party. The graduate can also act as an interpreter of the language in which he holds a degree that enables him to do so, in the cases envisaged by law. He can also participate in research centres, and terminology and documentation services. Furthermore, he can act as a linguistic editor and advisor of English upon request of the interested party.

(iii) *English Language and Literature Licentiate*

An English Language and Literature Licenciate can carry out studies and research about the knowledge of the English language, its composition, evolution, structure, different types of discourses and literature production in the context of universal literature. He can also take part in the development and evaluation of plans, programmes and projects of cultural nature. Furthermore, he can draw up, implement and supervise literary edition programmes.

5.1.4. Profile of the graduate of the Faculty of Languages

The technical training and humanistic education offered by the Faculty of Languages seek to train graduates that are efficient when carrying out the specific functions derived from their training in society, and committed to the people in Argentine reality. For these purposes, graduates from each of the University Programmes offered by this academic

institution should have acquired the following knowledge, specific capabilities, abilities and skills:

(i) *Profile of the Graduate Teacher*

- A graduate teacher will master the national language and, where applicable, the foreign language of his specialization; by *mastering the language,* we mean understanding it correctly when hearing and reading, and using it appropriately, orally and in writing, in any communicative situation.
- He will be willing to continuously improve his academic performance, according to the needs of the circle in which they interact, putting all their experience at the service of teaching, in a constant dialectic attitude between theory and practice.
- He will be able to clearly identify and formulate educational objectives according to the actual needs of the students.
- He will be able to guide, plan, support, conduct and assess the teaching and learning processes.
- He will have pedagogical and didactic criteria for the application of linguistic and communication theory.
- He will know how to appropriately identify and solve problems arising from teacher-student interaction, projecting it also at a social level while showing unbiased criterion and emotional stability.
- He will be an individual with beliefs and drive to adapt himself to new classroom situations, without leaving aside their critical judgement, and recognizing the importance of motivation and individual differences regarding the students' needs, interests, talents, attitudes, capabilities and skills. He will also promote mutual help and solidarity practices.
- He will have achieved a clear understanding of the cultural reality of the peoples whose language they have acquired, with no detriment of the value of the national and Latin American cultures and their scope in the universal sphere.
- He will be able to maintain a reasonable relation between the proposed educational purposes and the means to achieve them, in accordance with the quality of individual that they seek to educate.
- He will be able to ponder about the purpose of the teacher´s role and his individual and sociopolitical scope.

- He will have acquired the capability of making autonomous judgements based on strong arguments, not only in his area of specialization but also as a citizen.
- He will have held a set of prevailing values, which allows him to establish a hierarchy on ethical values.

(ii) *Profile of the Graduate National Public Translator*

- He will master the national language and, where applicable, the foreign language of their specialization; by *mastering the language*, we mean understanding it correctly when reading and using it correctly when writing.
- He will be willing to continuously improve his academic performance, according to the needs of the circle in which they interact, putting all their experience at the service of teaching, in a constant dialectic attitude between theory and practice.
- He will have become aware of his responsibility as a channel of written communication among the different cultures in their various spheres of expression.
- He will have proven to be aware of the responsibility of being faithful to the content and spirit of the texts he translates, while being able to mirror in the other language the idiomatic register of the original text.
- He will be able to identify and promote awareness of the cultural and sociopolitical contents expressed through linguistic behaviours.
- He will be able to reflect on the purpose of the function of National Public Translators and their individual and sociopolitical scope.
- He will have achieved a clear understanding of the cultural reality of the peoples whose language they have acquired, with no detriment of the value of the national and Latin American cultures and their scope in the universal sphere.
- He will have acquired the capability of making autonomous judgements based on strong arguments, not only in his area of specialization but also as a citizen.
- He will have held a set of prevailing values, which allows him to establish a hierarchy on ethical values.

(iii) *Profile of the Graduate Licentiate*

- He will master the national language and, where applicable, the foreign language of their specialization; by *mastering the language* we mean understanding it correctly when hearing and reading, and using it appropriately, orally and in writing, in any communicative situation.

- He will be willing to continuously improve his academic performance, according to the needs of the circle in which they interact, putting all their experience at the service of teaching, in a constant dialectic attitude between theory and practice.
- He will be able to activate the processes of reflection, comparison, identification, interrogation, creation and verification of linguistic and cultural problems.
- He will be able to identify and promote awareness of the cultural contents expressed through linguistic behaviours.
- He will be able to reflect on the individual and sociopolitical scope and sense of his function as a researcher.
- He will define, and know how to support, their own criteria for the selection of the appropriate techniques and means to fulfill the purposes of research according to the actual needs of society.
- He will have held a set of prevailing values, which allows him to establish a hierarchy on ethical values.

5.2. Analysis of the syllabus of *English Grammar I*

5.2.1. Definition and academic value of a syllabus

Etimologically, *syllabus* means a "label" or "table of contents". Wilkins (1981) points out that "syllabuses are specifications of the content of language teaching which have been submitted to some degree of structuring or ordering with the aim of making teaching and learning a more effective process".

Dubin & Olshtain (1997: 28) argue that a syllabus is:

a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translates the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level".

Richards & Schmidt (2002: 532), define *syllabus* as "a description of the content of a course of instruction and the order in which they are to be taught". The syllabus of a study course is an educational tool that often has more important functions than what commonly is acknowledged by administration, faculty, or students. The syllabus is often the initial communication tool that students receive as well as being the most formal mechanism for

sharing information with students regarding any course. Hence, the periodic review of a syllabus can be a quite effective means to evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning processes over time, as it serves a key role in course development.

Various theorists (Nunan, 1988; Richards, 1990; Weirs & Roberts, 1994; Dubin & Olshtain, 1997; Graves, 2000) agree that the syllabus of a course is one of the basic components that should be examined when conducting a course evaluation because it is an essential document that provides a description of the course objectives, content, time distribution, methodology and assessment procedures and criteria. Thus, the current syllabus of the subject under scrutiny was analysed to examine the relevance of such aspects to the programme goals and to the students´ needs and expectations. In the specific case of the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba, these documents constitute an important source of reliable information, since teachers are required to strictly follow the syllabuses of their courses, which are presented at the beginning of the academic year and supervised by the Academic Council.

Syllabus design does not happen in isolation. It is influenced by and it influences the different parts involved in language course design, such as pedagogical and methodological choices, evaluation and assessment. Any syllabus will provide a particular representation of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning as an expression of the dominant paradigm or frame of reference of the profession at a particular moment in history.

Whenever a choice is made by a syllabus designer, that choice is based on the designer´s ideas about teaching and learning, and that decision is also going to affect how and under which conditions a particular item is best taught, how language is meant to be used and learned, and how learning should be evaluated. In fact, as Nunan (1989) has proposed, different aspects of syllabus design such as content, methodology or assessment are so entangled that they are difficult to distinguish, and therefore must be considered simultaneously when designing, analysing and/or evaluating a syllabus.

At a global level, the syllabus, like a contract, makes the responsibilities of the instructor and of the students explicit (Grunert, 1997; McKeanchie, 1999). Danielson (1995: 8) claims that "the syllabus as contract can serve as the document by which the classroom practices, expectations and norms are discussed and codified. Any later ambiguities of meanings can be resolved by examining the contract that exists between the parties".

5.2.2. Description of the current course syllabus

The current syllabus of the course includes:

- the chair´s view of grammar

- the objectives

- the contents

- the conception of the student´s and the teacher´s roles

- the methodological approach and the type of activities to implement

- the assessment methodology and criteria

- the bibliography

a) About the Chair´s view of grammar

Graves (2000: 28) claims that "your view of what language is or what being proficient in a language means affects what you teach and how you teach it". Following this line of thought, and by analysing the current syllabus of the subject, we can conclude that the teaching staff clearly believe that both grammar knowledge and the way in which it is approached exert a great influence on developing a real language learning. They advocate in favour of the idea that teaching grammar focusing on communication is more effective than teaching grammar focusing only on structure.

The Chair considers grammar as a tool to help learners develop their ability to communicate. Thus, they insist on the importance of helping students develop their linguistic competence and increase their fluency and accuracy. They foster the idea that grammar plays a fundamental role in students´ language acquisition and, consequently, the structure of the language has to be viewed as an instrument of communication. Therefore, they consider grammar instruction to be an essential element of language teaching, giving it the same importance of other abilities.

In this scenario, it is claimed that, since it is important to account for the structure of the target language and its communicative use, it must be taken into account how grammar operates at three levels: (i) The subsentential or morphological level; (ii) The sentential or syntactic level; and (iii) The suprasentential or discourse level. In other words, the chair considers it necessary to include an analysis of how the morphology and syntax are used to accomplish certain discourse purposes at the suprasentential level because this level is particularly important in communication.

It is also stated that grammar is not merely a collection of forms but rather involves three dimensions: (morpho)syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, which means that grammatical structures not only have a morphosyntactic form, they are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics). These dimensions are referred to as the dimensions of *form*, *meaning*, and *use*. Moreover, these three aspects are interrelated; i.e., a change in one will involve a change in another.

The Chair suggests that in dealing with *form*, teachers should be interested in *how* a particular grammar structure is *constructed* (morphology and syntax). When dealing with meaning, the emphasis should be on *what* a particular English grammar structure *means*. Pragmatics, on the other hand, deals with issues concerning the *choices* that users of a particular language make when using the forms of language communication.

The Chair holds the belief that every time we write or speak, we make choices of what to say and how to say it. The vocabulary and grammar that we use to communicate are influenced by a number of factors, such as the reason for the communication, the setting, the people we are addressing, whether we are speaking or writing. Taken together, these choices give rise to systematic patterns of choice in the use of English grammar.

The syllabus also states that it is important to take into account that EFL students need to know not only how a structure is formed and what it means but also why speakers of English choose to use one form rather than another when both forms have more or less the same grammatical or lexical meaning. Therefore, teachers can account successfully for the pragmatics governing the use of a particular grammar structure if they can explain when it is used or why it has been used instead of another structure with the same meaning.

b) About the aims and objectives of the course

It is well known that when designing a syllabus, it is paramount to state the aims and objectives of the course. Objectives are said to be more specific than aims; they break down aims into smaller units of learning, and typically describe learning in terms of observable behaviour or performance (performance objectives), i.e. they describe "learning outcomes" in terms of what a learner will be able to do.

Objectives help planning the course and enable evaluators to judge the success or failure of a course of study. Richards (2001) suggests that the objectives should be:

a) consistent with the curriculum aims;

b) precise (not vague or ambiguous);

c) feasible (i.e. capable of being achieved at the end of the specified time).

Graves (2000: 75) claims that "stating your goals helps to bring into focus your visions and priorities for the course". She keeps on saying that "they are general statements, but they are not vague".

Richards (2001) suggests that aims have four main purposes:

1. to provide a reason for the course of study;

2. to provide guidelines for teachers and learners;

3. to provide a focus for learning;

4. to describe important and realizable changes in learning (or in students).

Hutchinson & Waters (1996), Jordan (1997), and Robinson (1990) claim that any approach to course design should start with some kind of analysis of target needs, present situations, students´ level of language profiency, etc. They state that only in this way and with the data obtained, will it be possible to formulate "general aims" and more "specific objectives" as intended outcomes. In other words, both the general and specific objectives should realise the learners´ needs and provide the basis for decision making in the course of study. A thorough needs analysis at the initial stage of the course would help to inform decisions concerning the formulation of both process and product objectives, and these, in turn, assist with the specification of syllabus content and procedures.

However, if we take into account that due to the current regulations in the Faculty of Languages, the syllabus for the 2010 academic year was designed and submitted in the Secretary of Academic Affairs in March, that is, before classes started (classes started in April), we should conclude that neither the aims nor the objectives proposed in the syllabus were the result of needs analysis, except for a study carried out on the bases of our experience in teaching the subject.

According to what the teachers expressed in the questionnaire-survey, the current syllabus (objectives, contents, teaching and learning methodology, assessment methodology and criteria, and study materials) was based on the professors´ past experience in teaching the subject, their beliefs and understanding on what language is, their views on the nature of the teaching and learning processes, the methodology they wanted to implement, and their knowledge of the context.

In the currect syllabus of the subject, the aims and objectives are explicitly stated at the beginning of the document. We can summarise the specific objectives to be attained during the academic year as follows:

By the end of the course of study, the students are expected to:

- have revised and consolidated the theoretical-practical contents developed in *English Grammar Practice* in order for them to optimize the learning process of the specific contents stated for *English Grammar I*.
- be able to apply the principles of syntactic analysis to a variety of texts.
- be aware of the relationship between grammatical structures, meaning and use.
- define, explain, and describe different syntactic phenomena.
- provide theoretical justifications for their syntactic choices.
- apply their analytical knowledge and skills to a variety of grammatical forms and functions in a range of texts.
- use suitable terminology (metalanguage) for describing grammar.
- carry out a contrastive analysis between English and Spanish, especially in those cases where the differences are noticeable.
- identify and edit errors.
- reflect on their own learning process and identify areas for change.

c) About the contents

The current syllabus responds to the synthetic model, as the contents are presented one at a time in a sequence most probably determined by notions of learnability, communicative competence and difficulty.

The syllabus is mainly concerned with what should be learned. The grammatical system of the language is pre-packaged by dividing it into small, discrete units. The contents are externally imposed on the learner, who has no say in them.

The different content units are organised around isolated syntactic or linguistic forms. The selection of such contents are based on the mimimum academic contents stated in the current Plan of Study, that is, on the patterns that "must be taught". Hence, we can affirm that this is a typical grammatical syllabus, as it contains a list of grammatical items or structures which are divided into units graded according to difficulty/importance. Students are expected to learn grammatical structures in a sequence that reflects their complexity, rather than their use in communication.

When asked about the decisions they had to make concerning what contents to include in the syllabus, the teaching staff expressed that it was a very difficult task, as they were aware of the fact that they were including too many topics to develop during the academic year. In this respect, Dubin and Olshtain (1997: 51) state that when selecting the

shape of the syllabus, "the basic dilemma which course planners must reconcile is that language is infinite, but a syllabus must be finite".

The current syllabus comprises six units, which cover the following contents:

Unit 1: An overview of the verb phrase

The English distinction between time and tense. Same tense with different time references. Different tenses used to refer to the same time. Aspect: Simple, progressive and perfective. Voice: Active and passive. Mood: Indicative, Subjunctive and Imperative. General review of the Present Progressive, Simple Present, Simple Past, Past Progressive, Present Perfect, Present Perfect Progressive, Past Perfect and Past Perfect Progressive Tense. Different ways of denoting future time reference in English: Simple Future; Future Progressive; Future Perfect; Future Perfect Progressive; *be going to* form; Simple Present and Present Progressive with future meaning; other ways of talking about the future: *be to + infinitive; be about to + infinitive; be on the brink of ... / verge of ... / point of ... (+ ing or noun); be sure / be bound to + infinitive; be due to + infintive, the future seen from the past.*

Unit 2: Adverbial clauses

Subordination: The complex sentence; matrix clauses; subordinate and superordinate clauses. Adverbial clauses of time, place, manner, reason, purpose, result, contrast or concession, contingency. The use of subordinators. Sequence of tenses and / or use of secondary auxiliary verbs. Inversion: Different types. Inversion after negative adverbials. Inversion after *so + adjective ... that; such + be ... that, neither ... ; nor ...*

Unit 3: The Expression of Hypothetical Meaning

The conditional sentence: Definition and main characteristics. The four commonest types (cause and effect; real present or open conditions; tentative, hypothetical and unreal conditions; unreal past or impossible conditions). Different subordinators. Sequence of tenses. Variations. Mixed conditionals. Inversion with conditional sentences.The use of I wish ... ; If only ...; I´d rather ... ; I´d sooner... ; It´s (about / high) time... ; I prefer ...

Unit 4: The Infinitive and the –ing forms

The Infinitive forms: The bare infinitive. Uses. The "to" infinitive. Functions of the "to" infinitive as a noun: Subject, Direct Object, Subject Complement, Apposition. Introductory "it" as Subject and Direct Object. The "to" infinitive after nouns (possible transformation

into relative clauses) and after adjectives. Adverbial uses of the "to" infinitive (purpose and result or consequence).   Catenatives.

The "ing" as a Gerund: Uses and characteristics as a noun and as a verb. The gerund as a noun pre-modifier: differences between the "ing" participle in meaning and stress. The gerund after possessive adjectives or nouns in the possessive case, or (pro)nouns in the objective case. Catenatives. The gerund after prepositions (e.g. fond of, accuse somebody of, etc.) The use of *be / get used to, accustomed to*. Verbs with different meaning according to whether they are followed by "to infinitive" or "ing".

Unit 5: Relative clauses

Defining and nondefining relative clauses. Characteristics. Differences in meaning and structure. The relative pronoun, the relative determiner "whose" and relative adverbs. Their use in defining and nondefining relative clauses. Choice of relative; the 0 (zero) relative or omission of the relative. The sentential relative clause: antecedent and subordinator.

Unit 6: Noun Clauses

General characteristics and different types of noun clauses."That" clauses: subordinator and functions. Differences between an appositive clause and a "that" relative clause. Interrogative ("wh" and "yes-no" interrogative) clauses: The use of the subordinators; different functions.The nominal relative clause: The use of the subordinators;   different functions. Difference(s) between a "wh" interrogative and a nominal relative clause. Comment clauses. Characteristics. Difference(s) between a nominal "that" clause and a comment clause.

d) About the conception of the student´s and the teacher´s roles

The current syllabus considers the student as the protagonist of his own learning process, since "he learns by doing, researching and experimenting". Within this context, the role of the teacher is that of a clear, concrete, responsible and creative organizer, a facilitator of new learning in a dialectic relationship with the student. Therefore, the teacher is expected to assume the role of a guide or facilitator in the development and growth of the grammatical competence of students; they will encourage the creation of a space in which the students *act*, becoming, in Piaget's words, *the builders of their own learning* and

interact cooperatively with the other protagonists, so that they can develop interpersonal and communication capabilities that enable the actors of the process to work, negotiate with others, find, obtain, organize and transmit information, make reasonable judgements and make decisions effectively.

e) About the methodological approach and type of activities to implement

In the current syllabus, classes are expected to be theoretical and practical by means of teaching strategies aimed at the active participation of students through exchange, reflection and the understanding of the different topics. Learning units will be introduced by means of inductive or deductive procedures through exemplification, exposition through dialogue, explanations on the part of the teacher, discussion of the topic, among other teaching strategies.

Learning is considered to be a dynamic process for the development of individual capabilities, by means of which human beings build up their knowledge through cooperation and interaction with the environment around them. Learning must be meaningful in order to allow the conscious and responsible incorporation of events, concepts, situations and experiences, so that students can generate new internalized concepts, new mental structures and new attitudes, through which students can analyse and solve the problems that may arise.

Teacher trainers will make the students become aware of the way in which the English language works from two different perspectives: (i) in an explicit way, asking students to carry out different types of activities that require the use of certain structures, or providing them with negative evidence so that they are able to discover and highlight some characteristics and/or behaviours typical of some grammatical structures; (ii) in an implicit way, giving students morpho-syntactic rules and/or generalities of the language so that they are able to transfer them to various activities and/or exercises in which they have to use the appropriate metalanguage.

The Chair also points out that all efforts will be devoted to striking a balance between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* grammar in order to help students find and analyse how the various structures are formed, what they mean and how they are used.

The activities designed will work as tools aiming at maintaining the equilibrium between a *perspective focused on pure syntax*, in which the different morpho-syntactic features become the central characteristic to be observed and analysed, and a

communicational perspective of language, where the emphasis is put on the way in which we must use language to create meaning. It is claimed that both perspectives have much to offer to foreign-language grammar teachers, since they help describe not only what the different grammar structures are used for, but also how they are used to create meaning within and above sentence level.

It is suggested that the grammatical contents are to be grammatically exploited via "consciousness-raising" activities as a way of promoting the learner´s ability to make his own structural analysis of the target language.

Although at first sight the layout of the syllabus leads us to believe that it is a sample of the linear format, which means that teachers cannot change the order of the units or skip any, it is clearly stated in the document that once a topic has been developed, it will be taken up again in a new context and expanded so that its treatment encourages the gradual development of a network of associations (cyclical or spiral treatment of grammatical items). Hence, there is special emphasis on reconciling the need for gradual introduction and recycling with giving the learner a chance of getting an overview and a global picture of a particular grammatical topic at a more complex or difficult level.

The following types of activities are said to be implemented during the course: gap filling, providing a theoretical justification for each of the choices made by the student; identification and classification of subordinate clauses in a text; justification of the meanings and uses of verb tenses; transformation exercises; error detection and correction; comparison and contrast of a number of sentences in a set, focusing on the grammatical and/or semantic differences between them; sentence building, following specific instructions; sentence completion, following specific instructions.

According to what is stated in the syllabus, all the activities will be organized taking into account their complexity; they will promote the gradual progress from teacher-guided activities to activities which foster autonomous learning, thus contributing to the development of problem solving strategies on the part of the student. In this way, the teacher will sometimes fulfil the role of transmitter of new information, coordinator and/or facilitator of learning.

The Chair also highlights the fact that, given the complexity of the subject, and since its parts cannot be adequately explained if they are separated from the whole they are part of, it becomes necessary to organise the description and development of the disciplinary contents taught during the academic year from the simplest structures and/or

characteristics to the most complex ones, following a spiraled cyclic progression mode so as to overcome and/or avoid any way of knowledge fragmentation.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework is expected to be considered not as a mere reference of the theoretical discourse, but as a source that generates inquiries to be answered through teacher-student and student-student interaction.

Within this context, and according to what is stated in the syllabus, the role of the teacher will be that of a clear, concrete, responsible and creative organizer, the facilitator of new learning in a dialectic relation with students. Therefore, the teacher will have the role of guiding the development and growth of students' grammatical skills and will encourage the generation of a space for them to *act* becoming the builders of their own learning and interacting collaboratively with the rest of the protagonists. In this way, they will encourage collaborative action so that social participation structures foster the development of inter-personal and communication skills that enable the actors participating in the process to work, negotiate with others, place, obtain, organise and transfer information, arrive at sound judgements and make wise decisions.

f) About evaluation procedures and criteria

As to the evaluation procedures and criteria, it is stated that students have to sit for two term tests. According to the current regulations of the institution, the minimun grade required to pass each term test is 4 (four), which equals 60%. The students are able to make up one of the term tests (in case of absence or failure) after the second term test has taken place. Students who sit for the make-up test are assessed only on the topics that were originally included in that particular term test.

After the course has finished, students have to sit for a final exam as either *students in good standing* or as *extra mural or external students*. All the examinatios – the term tests as well as the final exam - are written, and students are assessed on theoretical and practical aspects. The final exam for the students who kept in good standing comprises at least three sections, each of which is eliminatory. The final exam for extra-mural or external students includes an extra section (apart from the three sections obligatory for students in good standing), which is also eliminatory.

Clearly, the assessment criteria stated in the syllabus is product-oriented, as students are assessed on their outcomes in terms of mastery of the language, or, more specifically,

on the base of their proficiency in the handling of the grammatical structures taught during the academic year.
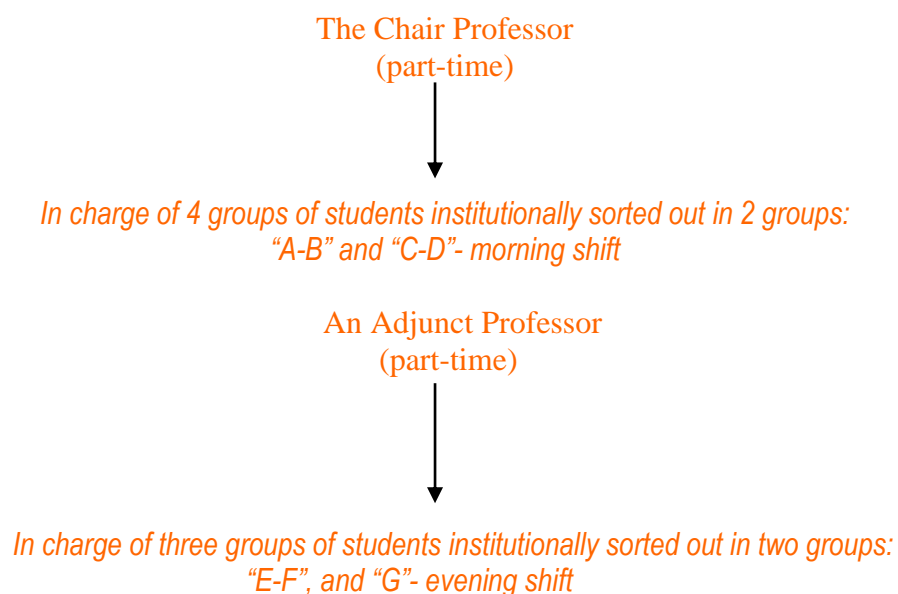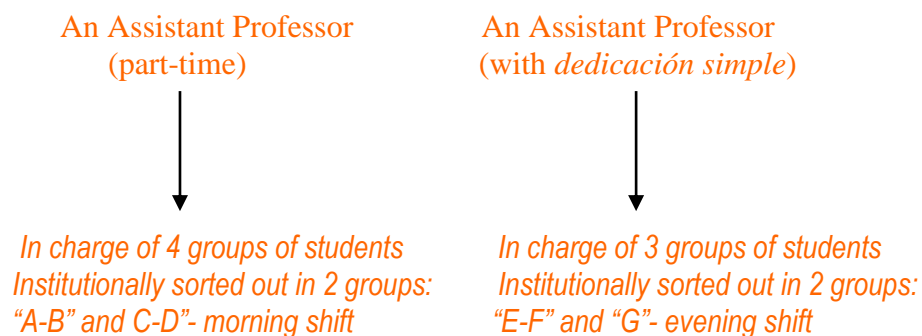
g) About the bibliography

As to the bibliography, it is divided into "obligatory" and "recommended" bibliography,. The obligatory bibliography comprises a handbook specially designed by the teaching staff and a monolingual dictionary.

Regarding the recommended bibliography, the Chair has listed 120 textbooks for further theoretical and practical reference. It is worth mentioning that the bibliography seems to be quite complete, updated, and quite suitable for the level of the students. However, according to the information provided by the library´s staff of the Faculty of Languages, only 10% of the books listed in the syllabus can be found and/or consulted there.

5.3. Structure of the Chair of *English Grammar I*

The composition of the Chair of *English Grammar I* reflects the typical pyramidal structure. Hence, during the 2010 academic year, the structure of the Chair was the following:

The Chair Professor
(part-time)

In charge of 4 groups of students institutionally sorted out in 2 groups:
"A-B" and "C-D"- morning shift

An Adjunct Professor
(part-time)

In charge of three groups of students institutionally sorted out in two groups:
"E-F", and "G"- evening shift

An Assistant Professor
(part-time)

An Assistant Professor
(with *dedicación simple*)

↓

↓

*In charge of 4 groups of students
Institutionally sorted out in 2 groups:
"A-B" and C-D"- morning shift*

*In charge of 3 groups of students
Institutionally sorted out in 2 groups:
"E-F" and "G"- evening shift*

Since 2000, the students enrolled in second year have been sorted out in eight different groups. However, in 2007 the authorities of the Faculty of Languages decided – without any serious academic grounds - to diminish the number of teachers hired in the Chair of *English Grammar I.* For this reason, since that time, students doing the subject have been distributed or sorted out in four groups (instead of eight, as it is the case of *English Language II*, or seven, as in *Phonetics and Phonology I* and *Spanish Language II*). Thus, the student-teacher ratio in the morning shift has become too high in detriment of the quality of the teaching and learning processes. It is worth mentioning that, according to the current regulations in the Faculty of Languages, the Assistant Professors are, in general terms, not allowed to deal with the theoretical aspects of the different topics included in the syllabus. Thus, the students in each group cannot be divided in smaller groups in order to improve the quality of the teaching and learning processes.

The following chart shows the number of students attending classes in each group during the academic year 2010:

Group	Number of students	Teaching Staff
A-B	128	The Chair Professor and an Assistant Professor
C-D	126	The Chair Professor and an Assistant Professor
E-F	51	The Adjunct Profesor and an Assistant Professor
G	23	The Adjunct Profesor and an Assistant Professor

5.4. Academic record of the teaching staff

The following charts show different aspects concerning the academic record of the teaching staff of the Chair of *English Grammar I* during the academic year 2010:

Chart 1

Teacher	Post	Ongoing posgraduate studies	Degree	Posgraduate degree
A	Head Professor	Master in Applied Linguistics Master in University Teaching	Teacher of English	Specialist in University Teaching
B	Adjunct Professor	Master in Applied Linguistics	Teacher of English English Translator	------------
C	Assistant Professor	Master in University Teaching	Teacher of English English Translator Licenciate in English Language and Literature	Specialist in University Teaching
D	Assistant Professor	Master in Spanish Teaching as a Native and Foreign Language	English Translator	--------------

Chart 2

Current post in the Chair	Seniority in the Chair	Former posts held in the Chair	Category held as a research teacher (SECyT UNC)	Current Participation in Research Proyects
Head Professor	15 years	Student-Assistant; Teacher-in-Training; Assistant Professor; Adjunct Professor	3	Director
Adjunct Profesor	5 years	Teacher-in-Training; Assistant Professor	5	Member
Assistant Professor	4 years	Teacher-in-Training	------------	Member
Assistant Professor	2 years	Teacher-in-Training	------------	Member

5.5. Concerning the role and duties of the teaching staff

Regarding the role and duties carried out by Chair´s staff during the academic year 2010, and according to Resolution # 114/04 of the Board of Education of the Faculty of Languages, we can mention the following:

The Head Professor was in charge of:

- the planning, coordination, supervision and evaluation of the teaching and learning processes of the subject, according to the curricular objectives established in the current Plan of Studies.
- the selection, elaboration and systematization of the didactic material used to develop the theoretical and practical contents stipulated in the current syllabus.
- the organization and supervision of the plan of distribution of teaching activities of the staff, the schedule planned for the development of the syllabus and of the working plan, in accordance with the schedule stipulated by the Faculty.
- the summoning of the teaching staff to periodical meetings in order to carry out the organization and supervision of the development of the syllabus and the plan of didactic and pedagogical activities implemented.
- the scheduling, coordination and participation in graduate training and updating activities.
- the evaluation of the teaching performance of the Assistant Teachers in his gropus as well as the orientation and supervision of the work carried out by Teachers-in-Training and Student-Assistants he was in charge of.
- the planning, direction and execution of a research project backed up by the Office of Science and Technology (SECyT) of the UNC.
- the supervision and correction of the classes taught by the Teachers-in-Training he was in charge of.
- the design and presentation of the annual teaching reports required by the Office of Academic Affairs of the Faculty of Languages.
- the participation in Examination Boards to evaluate Professors applying to a teaching post in *English Grammar I* and other subjects.

Concerning the Adjunct Professor, she:

- helped the Head of the Chair conduct and evaluate the teaching and learning processes.
- taught the contents of the subject and carried out the activities assigned to her.
- helped with the selection, elaboration and systematization of the didactic material used to develop the theoretical and practical contents stipulated in the current syllabus.
- evaluated the evaluation of the teaching performance of the Assistant Teachers in her groups.
- took part in the meetings summoned and coordinated by the Head of the Chair.
- took part in a number of academic and training activities organized by the Chair.
- was a member of the final examination boards of the subject.
- took part in a research project backed up by the SECyT of the UNC.
- complied with the design and presentation of the annual teaching reports required by the Office of Academic Affairs of the Faculty of Languages.

As regards the Assistant Professors, they:

- participated in the planning and execution of the teaching functions, particularly regarding the design, management and correction of practical tasks and term tests.
- taught some contents of the subject in the group(s) to which they were assigned, under the supervision of the Head of the Chair or the Adjunct Professor.
- were members of the final examination boards of the subject.
- took part in the meetings summoned and coordinated by the Head of the Chair.
- took part in a number of academic and training activities organized by the Chair.
- took part in a research project backed up by the Office of Science and Technology of the UNC.

Regarding the activities carried out by Professors-in-Training, they:

- helped with the design, implementation and evaluation of all the activities planned by the Head Teacher.
- prepared, taught and evaluated a topic of the current syllabus of the subject, supervised by the Head Teacher.
- started to plan and write their final work (only those attending their second year) as Professors-in-Training.

Finally, we should refer to the activities carried out by Student-Assistants:

- They guided individual and group tasks.
- They designed and corrected extra practice.
- They gave the students some guidance concerning bibliography for them to get further theory and practice on the different topics dealt with in class.

CHAPTER 6
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Education society should be based on the acquisition, updating and use of knowledge. These are the three functions that should be highlighted during the educational process. As the information society develops and the possibilities to access data and events multiply, education should enable everyone to benefit from this information, collect it, select it, organize it, manage it and use it. Therefore, education should continuously adapt to social changes, but without giving up the transmission of acquired knowledge, principles and the fruits of experience.

(Delors, 1996)

6.1. Analysis of the data collected in the students´ questionnaire-surveys

The sample we have analysed includes 250 students, which represents 81% of the student population enrolled in the course during the academic year 2010. We must point out that a sample of 262 questionnaires was collected; however, only 250 were analysed, since the rest had to be discarded because they were rather incomplete. The following chart shows the number of students who answered the questionnaire in each group (*comisión*):

| Group	Number of students who answered the questionnaire-survey
A-B	109
C-D	105
E-F	35
G	13

The figures that follow illustrate the distribution, in percentage terms, for each of the aspects evaluated in the questionnaire-survey. Some charts have also been included to facilitate an effective analysis and presentation of the data.

Figure 1
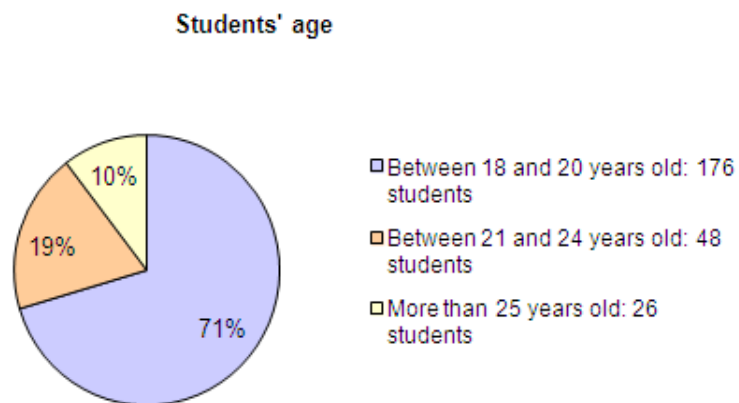
Students' age

Concerning the age of the students enrolled in the course during the academic year 2010, we can assert that the majority of the students ranged from 18 to 20 years old.

Figure 2
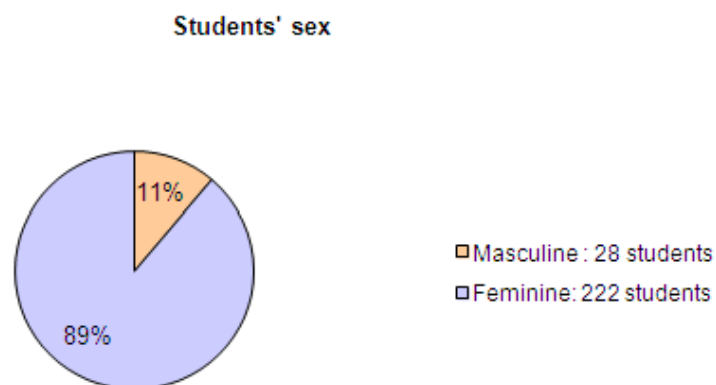
Students' sex

With respect to the sex of the students doing the subject, the data collected shows a predominance of female respondents, which is typical in the Faculty of Languages.

Figure 3

Enrolment year
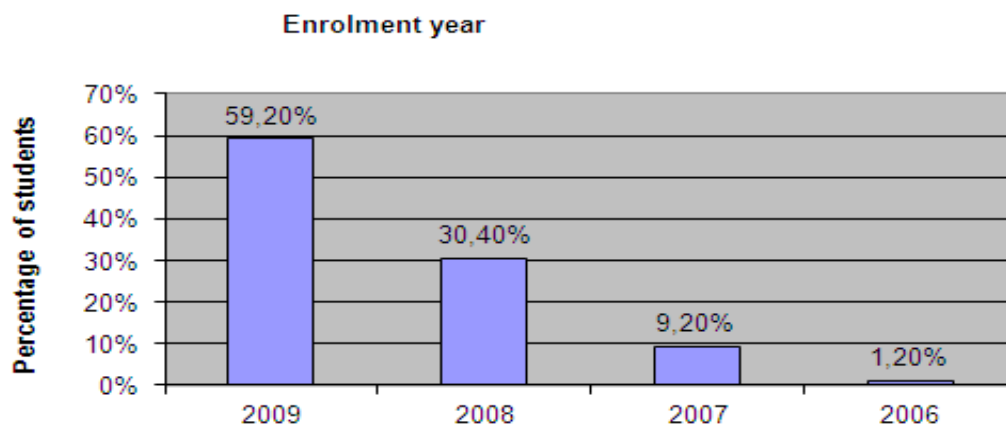
Figure 3 shows us that 59,2% of the students (148 respondents) enrolled in 2009; 30,4% (76 students) began their studies in 2008; only 10,4% (= 26 students) started before 2008.

Figure 4

Hours per week devoted to studying for this course
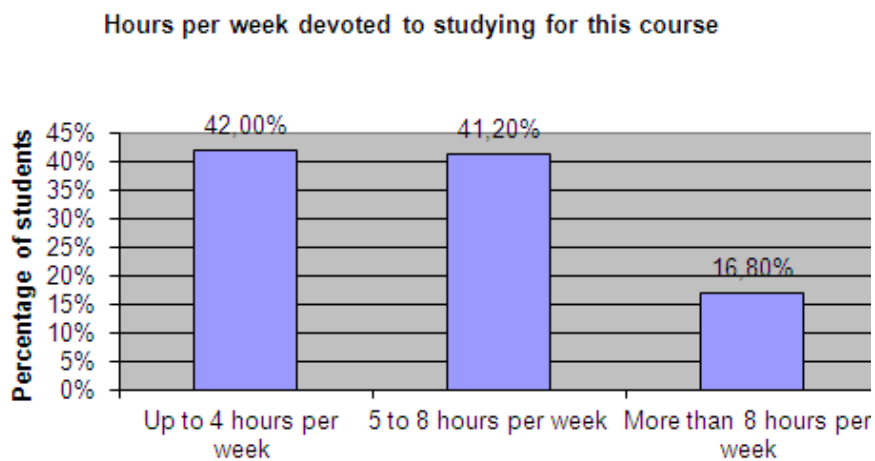
When asked about the amount of time the students had devoted to studying the subject during the academic year, 42 students (16,8%) answered that they had devoted more than 8 hours a week, while 103 (41,2%) said they had devoted 5 to 8 hours a week. 105 students (42%) claimed that they had devoted up to four hours a week.

Figure 5

Opinion about the amount of time devoted to the contents of the course

3%

47%

50%

□ Small: 118 students
□ Sufficient: 125 students
□ Excessive: 7 students

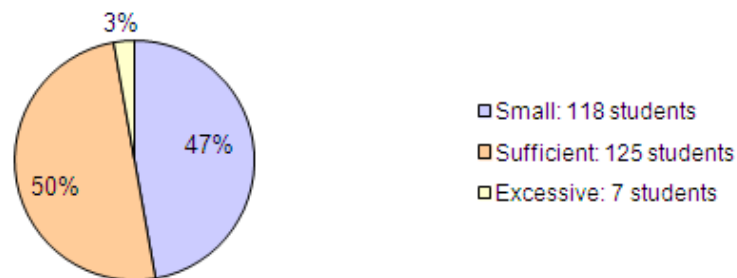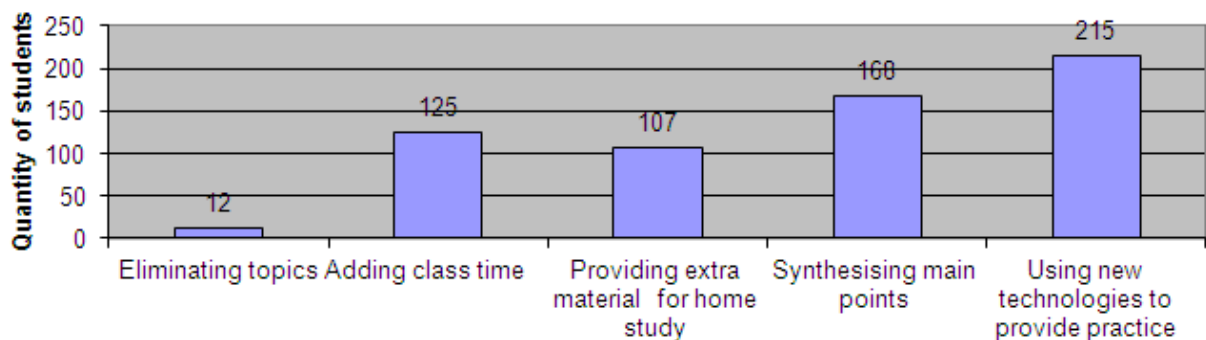Half the students thought that the teachers had devoted enough time to the development of the course contents, whereas 47% believed that the time alloted to developing the topics was not enough.

Figure 6

Way of eliminating the difficulty of the small amount of class time

This question was closely related to the previous one, since those students who answered that the time devoted to the development of the course contents was not enough were asked to indicate different ways in which that difficulty could be overcome. For this purpose, they had to choose from a set of given alternatives. For such a purpose, the students could choose more than one option. The results obtained show that most of the students chose "by using new technologies"; 160 students favoured "by synthesising main points"; 125 students thought that one way to overcome the problem is "by adding class time"; 107 students asked for extra material for home study; only 12 students believed that a good solution would be "removing some topics from the syllabus".

Figure 7

Percentage of attendance
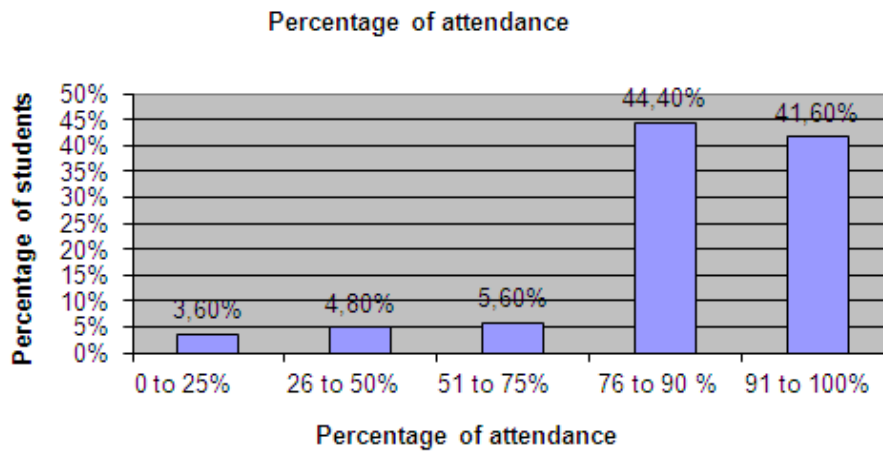
Concerning the percentage of class attendance, a good number of students (104) claim to have attended practically all classes, while 111 students said that they had attended 76% to 90% of the classes. 14 students expressed that they had attended 51% to 75 % of the classes. Just a few students declared that their percentage of attendance was less than 50%.

Figure 8

Opinion about the topics developed in the course
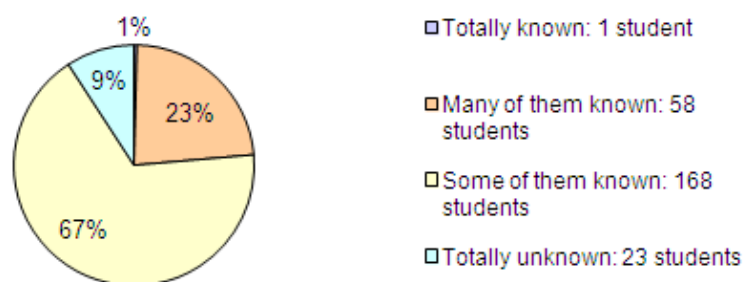
the findings show that the majority of the students agreed that they had some previous knowledge about some of the course contents developed during the academic year. 58 students declared that they were familiar with many of the topics. For a small group of students, all the course contents were totally unknown.

Figure 9

Person students resorted to in order to solve problems in the teaching and learning process
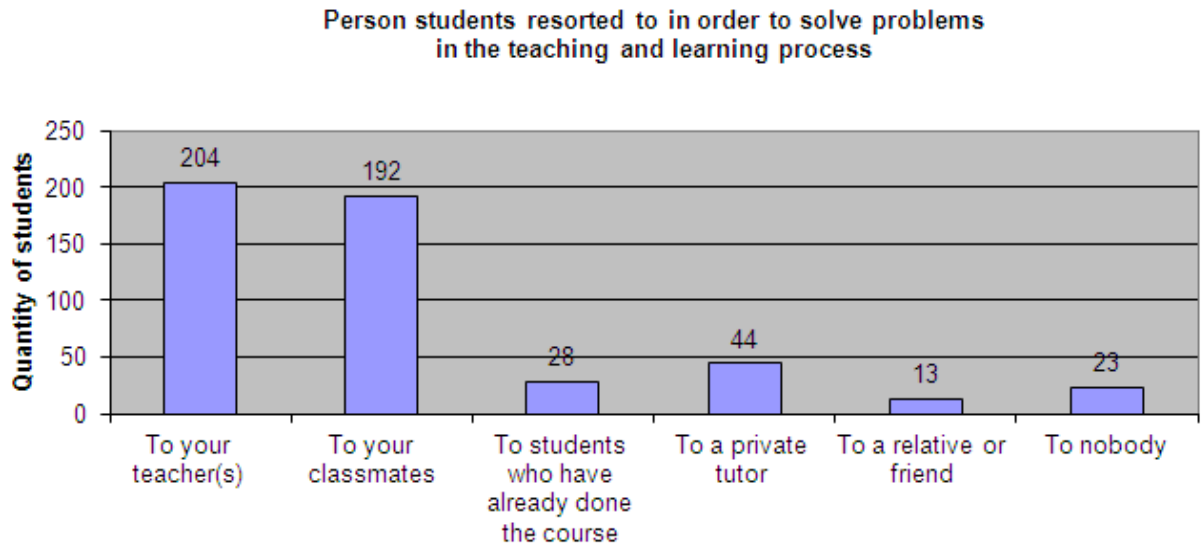
When asked about the people they had resorted to solving problems concerning the teaching and learning processes, most of the students answered that they had consulted either their teachers or their classmates. 44 students (17,6%) claimed to have resorted to a private tutor, while 28 students (11,2%) said they had consulted a student who had already taken the subject. It is worth pointing out that, in this case, the students could choose more than one option.

Figure 10

Explanation of the contents of the course
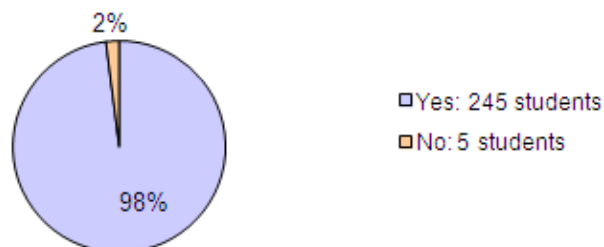
It was particularly notable that practically all the respondents expressed that at the beginning of the academic year the teachers had referred to the contents that were going to be developed throughtout the course.

Figure 11

Explanation of the methodology of evaluation

□ Yes: 231students
□ No: 19 students
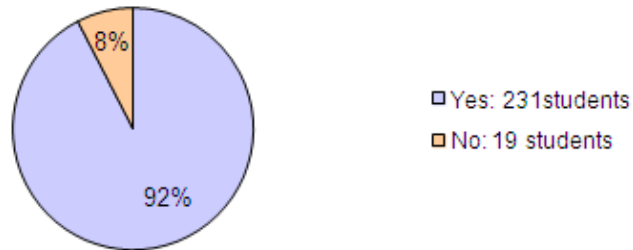
92% of the students agreed substantially on the fact that the methodology to be implemented throughout the course was made clear from the beginning of the academic year.

Figure 12

Explanation of assessment criteria

□ Yes: 233 students
□ No: 17 students
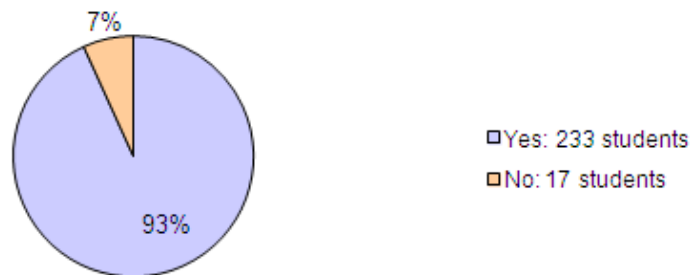
Figure 13

Reference to required bibliography

□ Yes: 244 students
□ No: 6 students
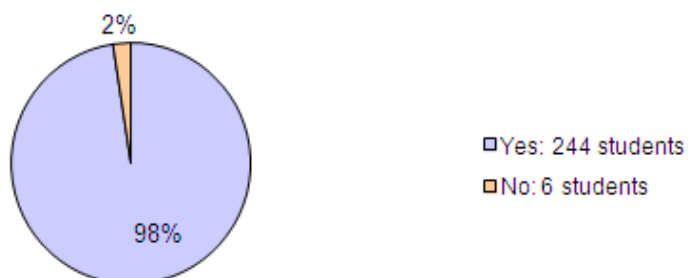
As we can see from figures 12 and 13, the majority of students declared that, at the beginning of the academic year, their teachers had made explicit reference to the assessment criteria to be implemented as well as the required bibliography for the course.

Figure 14

Learning strategy instruction

Yes: 96 students
No: 154 students
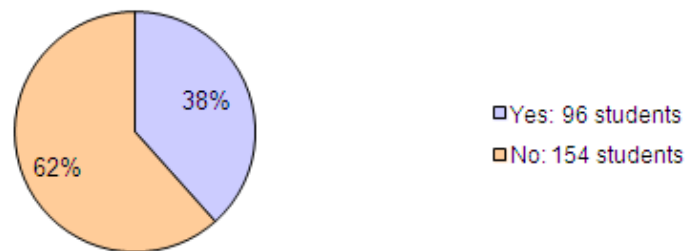
Figure 15

Use of learning strategies

Yes: 78 students
No: 172 students
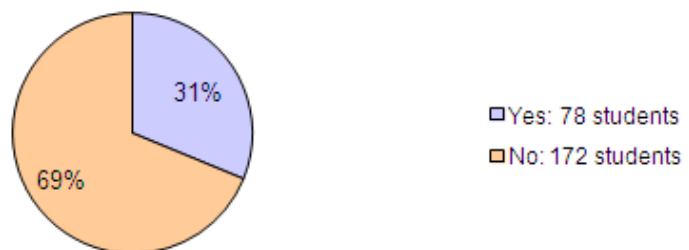
Figure 14 illustrates that 172 respondents, that is 69% of the subjects, claimed that they had not received any explicit instruction concerning the use of learning strategies during the academic year. However, in spite of such luck of instruction, 78 students, that is 31% of the respondents, claimed to have used different learning strategies to improve their learning process during the academic year (Figure 15).

Figure 16

Explanation of the role of the teachers in charge of the course

7%

93%

Yes: 232 students
No: 18 students

Practically all the students agreed on the fact that their teachers had referred to the role held by each member of the chair´s staff at the beginning of the school year.

Figure 17

Degree to which the role assigned to teachers was performed

4%

96%

Yes: 241 students
No: 9 students

Most of the students declared that the teachers had stuck to the roles assigned to each of them at the beginning of the academic year.

Figure 18

Guidance on the topics and exercises included in tests

12%

88%

Yes: 221 students
No: 29 students

88% of the students stated that they had been instructed regarding the course contents and type of activities that were going to be included in each of the term tests.

Figure 19

Percentage to which the schedule was followed

10%

90%

☐Yes: 226 students
☐No: 24 students
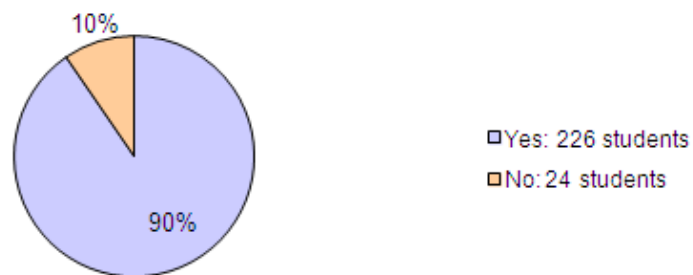
A significant number of students (226 = 90%) agreed that the teachers had tightly followed the schedule of activities presented at the beginning of the school year.

Figure 20

Use of the required bibliography

7%

93%

☐Yes: 232 students
☐No: 18 students
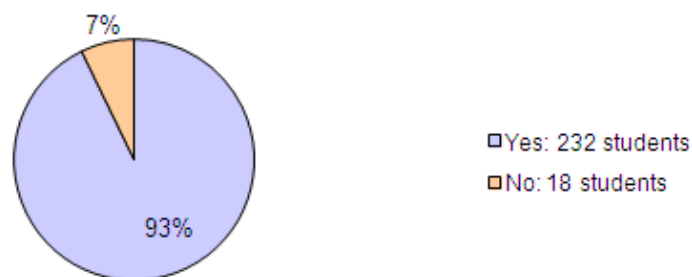
The majority of the students claimed to have used the required bibliography to study and practise the course contents developed during the academic year.

Figure 21

Development of the syllabus topics

4%

96%

☐Yes: 241 students
☐No: 9 students
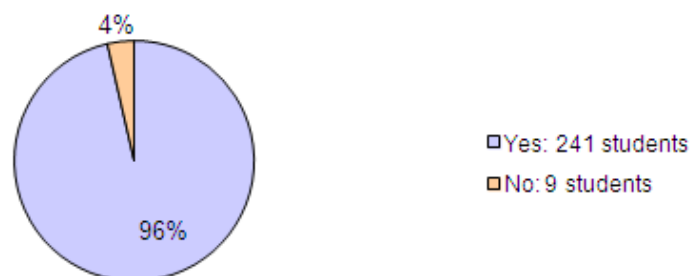
Figure 22

Correction of assigned practice activities in class

9%

91%

☐ Yes: 228 students
☐ No: 22 students
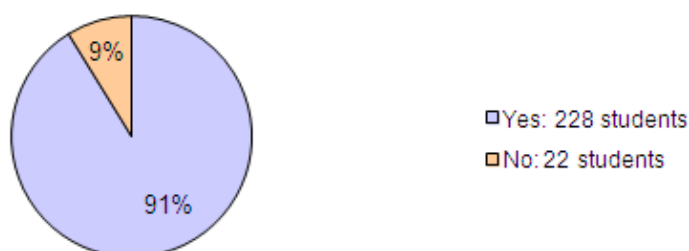
A great number of students asserted that all the course contents included in the syllabus had been developed (Figure 21). Likewise, the great majority expressed that the assigned practice activities had been corrected in class (Figure 22).

Figure 23

Degree to which the methodology of evaluation was followed

4%

96%

☐ Yes: 240 students
☐ No: 10 students
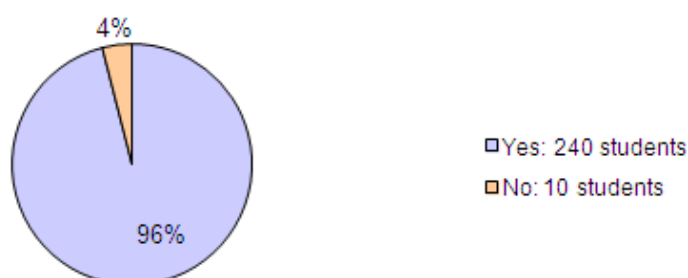
The information gathered in the questionnaire-surveys shows that the students share quite a positive perception concerning the extent to which the teachers implemented the methodology described at the beginning of the academic year.

In the following section of the questionnaire-survey, the subjects were asked to evaluate different aspects of the teaching and learning processes. For this purpose, they had to use a scale going from 1 (which expressed the lowest level in their personal appreciation) to 5 (which expressed the highest level in their personal appreciation).

After having analysed the data collected, it could be observed that a significant number of students expressed a favourable attitude towards the following aspects:

Figure 1: Classroom atmosphere

Classroom atmosphere
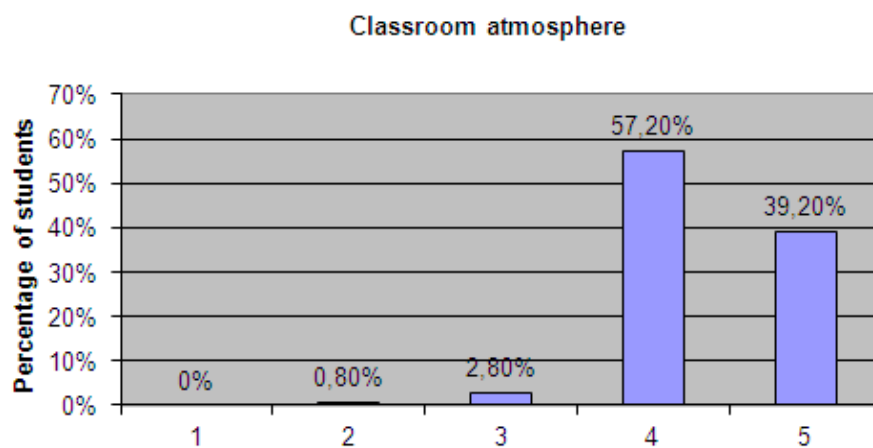
Figure 2: Quality of the study materials

Quality of study material
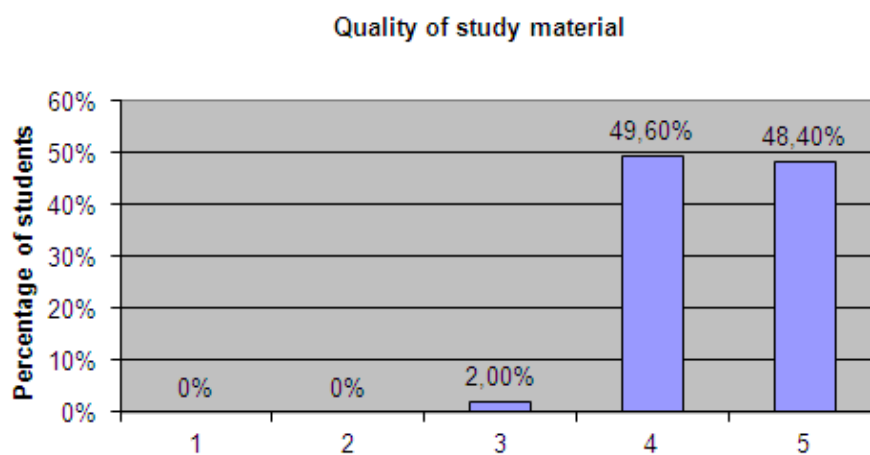
Figure 3: Level of teacher commitment on the teaching and learning processes

Level of teacher commitment
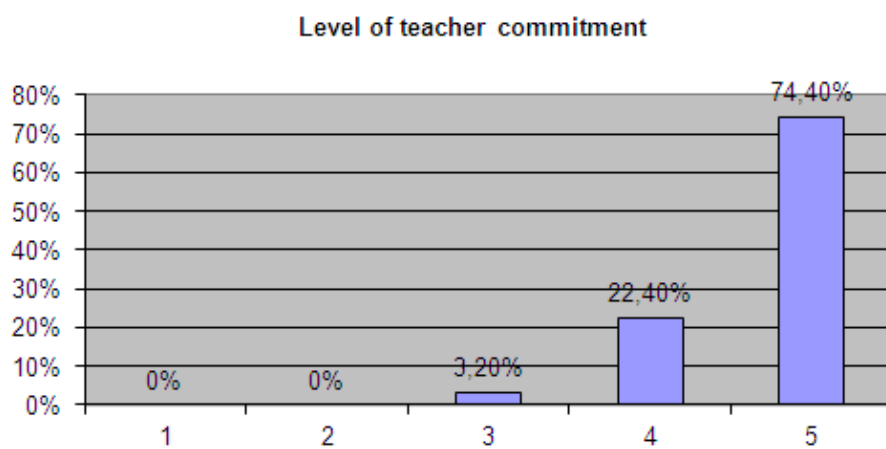
Figure 4: Clarity to explain topics and concepts on the part of the teachers

Clarity to explain topics and concepts
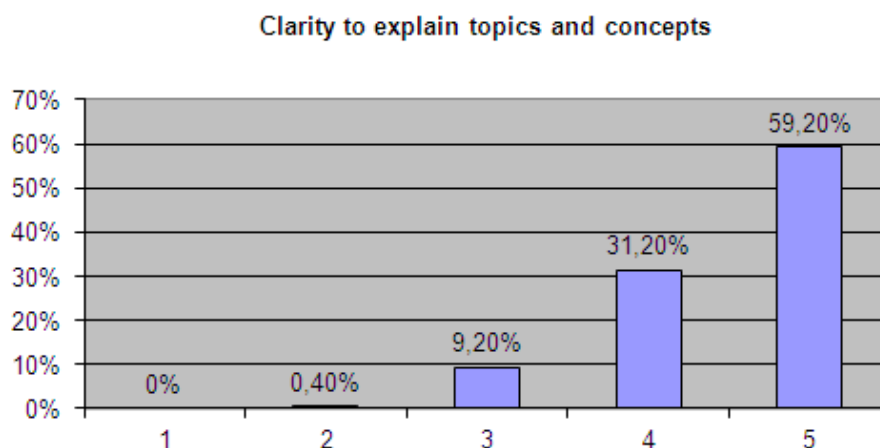
Figure 5: Degree of knowledge of the course contents demonstrated by the teachers

Degree of knowledge of contents demonstrated by teachers
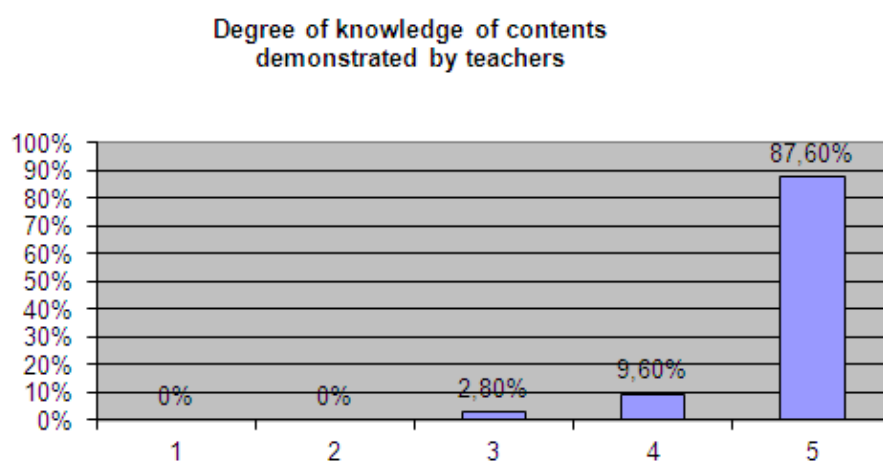
Figure 6: Relationship between the time devoted to the theoretical development of the course contents and the practice activities

Relationship between the time devoted to the theoretical development of topics and practice activities
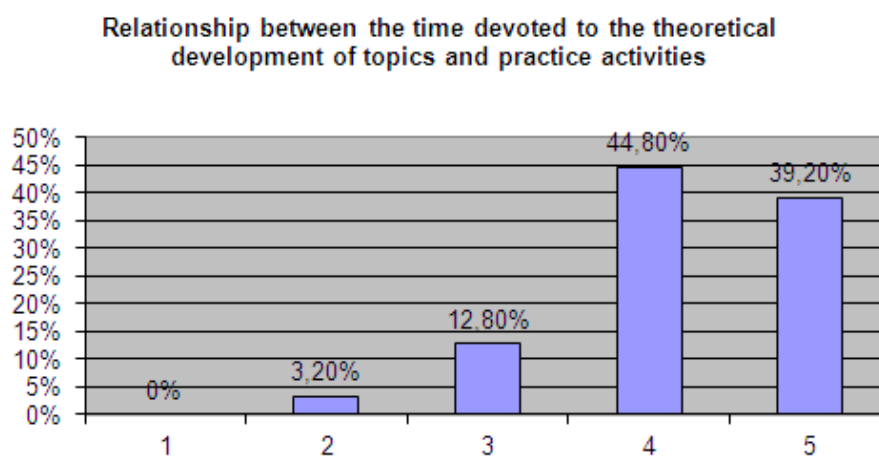
Figure 7: Degree of complexity of theoretical and practical contents

Degree of complexity of theoretical and practical contents
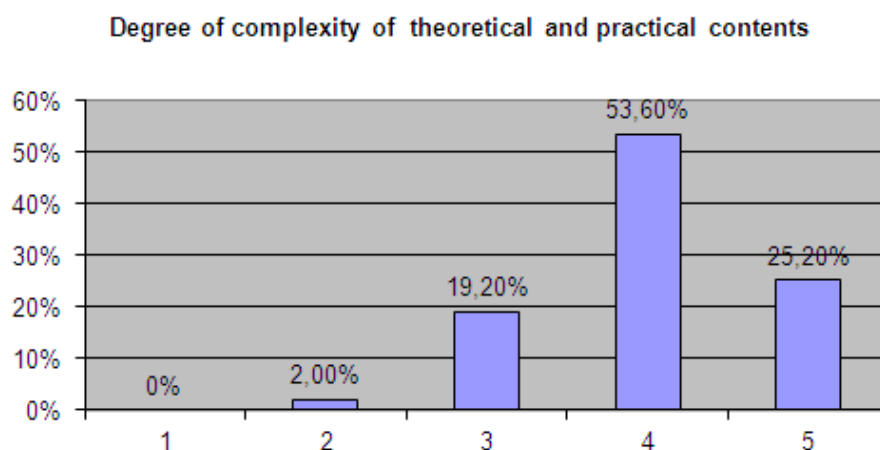
Figure 8: Degree of correspondence between the practice activities carried out in class and the exercises included in the tests

Degree of correspondence between practice activities carried out in class and exercises included in tests
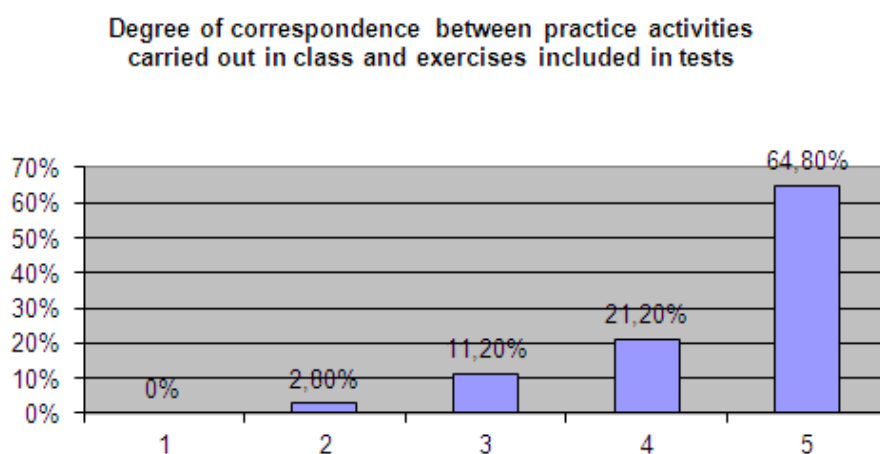
Figure 9: Degree of complexity of the tests

Degree of complexity of tests
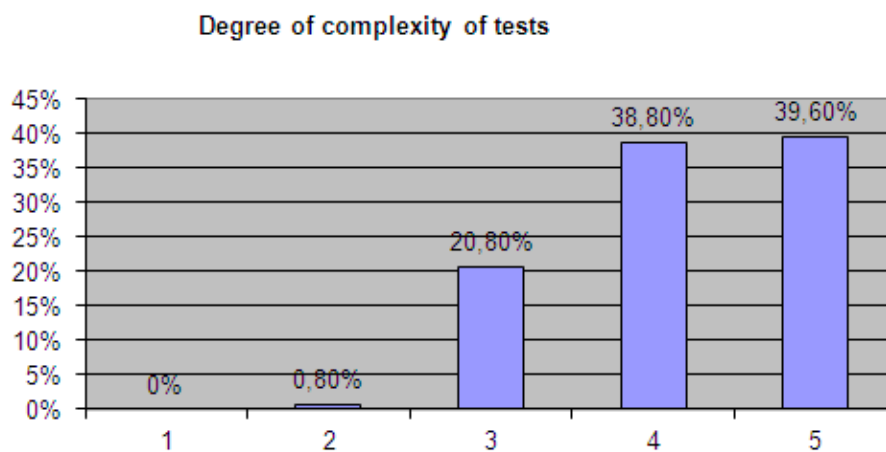
Figure 10: Teaching methodology implemented in class

Teaching methodology
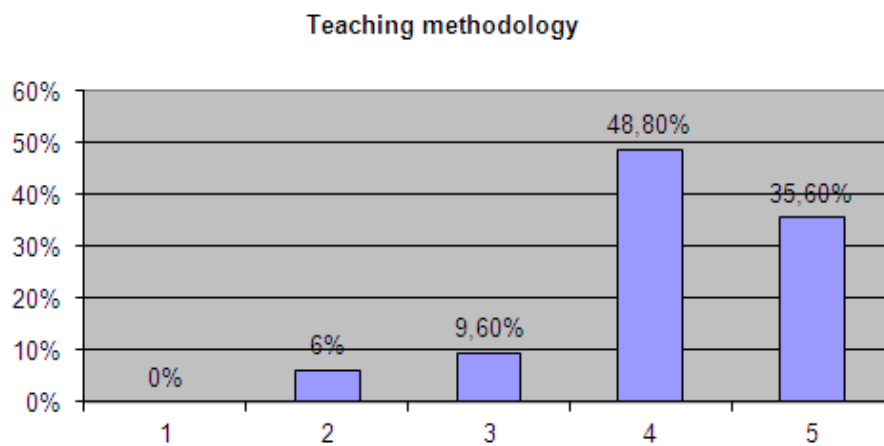
Figure 11: Degree of student participation in class

Degree of student participation in class
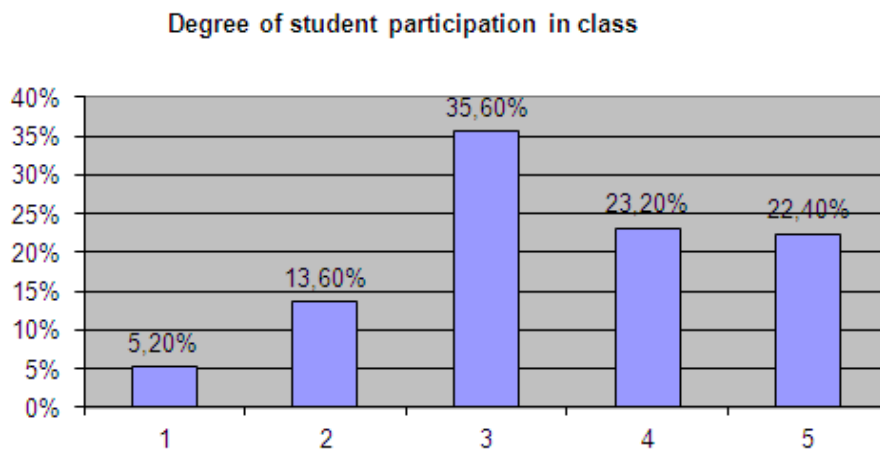
Figure 12: Level of knowledge acquired by the students in the course

Level of knowledge acquired by students in the course
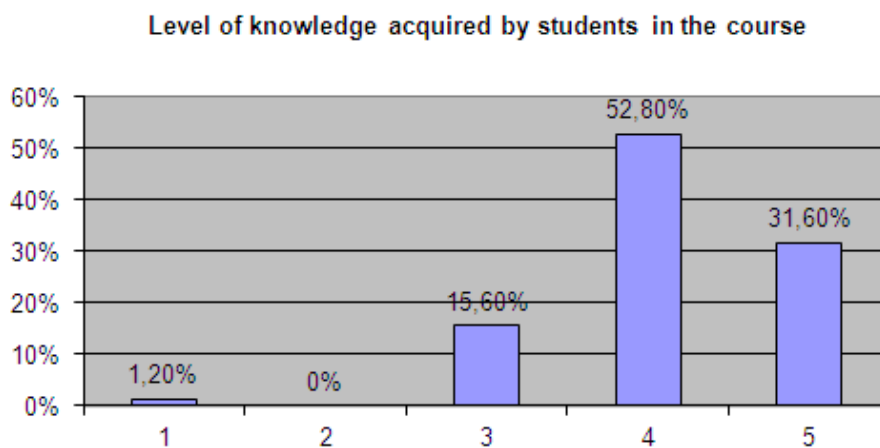
In the third section of the questionnaire-survey, the students had to indicate how frequently their teachers had shown some interest in different aspects of the teaching and the learning processes. For this purpose, a Lickert scale was used. Students had to choose one of the following options: *always*; *sometimes*; or *never*.

The teachers showed interest in optimizing the teaching and the learning proceses by	*Frecuency*		
	Always	*Sometimes*	*Never*
Making the students get interested in the topics	110 sts = 44%	122 sts = 48,80%	18 sts = 7,20%
Answering the students´ questions	229 sts = 91,6%	21 sts = 8,4%	0 sts = 0%
Advising the students about extra bibliography they could consult to do further practice	18 sts = 7,2%	175 sts = 70%	57 sts = 22,8%
Providing feedback on the results of the evaluations and the most common mistakes made in such tests.	201 sts = 80,4%	18 sts = 7,2%	31 sts = 12,4%
Helping the students correct the mistakes they had made in the tests.	92 sts = 36,8%	142 sts = 56,8%	16 sts = 16,4%
Providing the opportunity to consult the teachers in office hours.	27 sts = 10,8%	68 sts = 27,2%	105 sts = 62%
Providing the students with consolidation exercises.	96 sts = 38,4%	83 sts = 33,2%	71 sts = 28,4%
Using varied and up-to-date study materials and making use of TIC .	20 sts = 8%	195 sts = 68%	35 sts = 14%

In the following section of the questionnaire-survey, the students had to mark with an X 5 (five) main difficulties they had faced during the development of the course.

We will present the results in a descending order according to the number of students (or frequency rate) with which the students chose the different options. The analysis has been divided in two sections: Section "A" refers to administrative problems, where Section "B" refers to difficulties related to content subject as such.

SECTION A

- Lack of access to office hours in which the teachers can answer the students´ questions, clarify doubts, and provide additional explanations. *205 students*
- The high student-teacher ratio *193 alumnos*
- Lack of time during the acadamic year to develop all the course contents. *165 students*
- Little access to the recommended bibliography cited in the syllabus. *142 students*

SECTION B

- Complexity of the topics dealt with in class through the course *131 students*
- Assessment methodology and criteria. *118 students*
- Methodology implemented during the school year. *95 students*
- Lack of clarity on the part of the teachers when dealing with the theoretical aspects of the topics. *56 students*
- Disparity between the type of practice activities developed in class and the ones actually included in the tests. *48 students*
- Disparity between the contents dealt with in class and the ones evaluated in the tests. *32 students*
- Disparity between the objectives stated in the syllabus and the ones fulfilled during the academic year. *31 alumnos*
- Disparity between the evaluation criteria set up in the syllabus and the ones applied in the tests. *23 students*
- The teacher´s attitude towards the students. *8 students*
- Lack of previous knowledge. *3 students*

It is important to highlight the fact that a significant number of students claimed that the main problems they encountered during the development of the course were associated with administrative problems. It is worth mentioning that the teaching staff are not empowered to to solve this type of difficulties.

For example, there is no room available in the institution to offer the students office hours. Regarding the high student-teacher ratio, in the academic year 2007 the Chair informed the authorities about this problem, but so far the situation has remained the same. We should highlight that, according to the statistics provided by the Students´ Office, in

the year 2010 the Chair of *English Grammar I* had the highest student-teacher ratio in the Faculty of Languages.

As to the weekly hourly load devoted to the development of the subject contents, we should say that it is officially determined in the Plan of Studies. Hence, it is not in the hands of the teaching staff to make any changes even if they agree with the students on the fact that four periods of fourty minutes each a week is neither enough for the teachers to develop all the subject contents fully and realistically nor for the students to digest such contents, to understand what is being taught, to interact with their peers and teachers.

Related to this issue is the fact that the academic schedule becomes quite limited, since the academic course generally starts at the end of March and finishes the last week of October (It should be noted here that students do not attend classes during May´s Week, the Student´s Week, and the whole of July, not to mention the national or public holidays). This schedule is yearly stated by the Academic Council of the Faculty, so teachers have to stick to it.

Finally, regarding the fact that there are very few grammar books that students can consult in the the Faculty of Languages´ library, we should make it clear that although the Chair has informed the authorities about this issue for the last few years and, in spite of their promising that they would get some of the books listed in the syllabus, nothing has been done up to now to alleviate this problem.

Analysis of the students´ answers to the open-ended questions (section "D" of the questionnaire-survey):

➢ The findings reveal that most of the students regarded the following contents as the most interesting and/or useful ones:

- Subordination (Adverbial, Relative and Noun clauses).
- The use and the meanings of verb tenses.
- The expression of hypothetical meanings.

We must point out that, at the same time, these topics were considered to be the most difficult ones by a large number of students.

As to the learning strategies mostly used by the students, the respondents mentioned the following ones:

- Associating prior knowledge with the lesson topic to be learned.
- Doing the practice activities assigned for homework so that they could correct them in class and learn from their errors.
- Look for their own examples to illustrate the theory.
- Reading the theoretical framework for each of the topics developed in class in advance.
- Taking notes by writing down key words and concepts in abbreviated verbal or graphic form.
- Organising content information to be learned by means of graphic organisers or schematic representations of the subject-area contents.
- Making a written summary of information gained from listening to the teacher´s explanations given in class and from reading the theoretical concepts in the handout.
- Using reference materials such as dictionaries or textbooks.
- Getting additional explanation or clarification from a teacher or a classmate.
- Working with peers to complete a task or solve a problem.

It is paramount to mention that a minority of the students sampled (31%) declared to have used learning strategies during the academic year.

➢ When the students were asked about the integration between the subject-area concepts developed in *English Grammar I* with the ones developed in *English Language II* and *Phonetics and Phonology I*, the majority of them (176 = 70,4%) answered that such integration could be observed in the evaluations; however, they did not observe it in the activities implemented in class. On the other hand, a small mimory of students (20 = 8%) expressed that they could integrate the concepts when they were engaged in oral activities.

➢ The majority of the responding learners (212 = 84,8%) considered the teaching staff as well-trained and rated the course as good. They also appreciated that there were a great number of activities in the handout as well as the fact that such activities were checked in class.

➢ Most students (172 = 68,8%) agreed and positively valued that the term tests were corrected in an expeditious and qualified manner.

➢ A significant majority of respondents (210 = 84%) perceived the course contents as relevant and of high academic standard although they consider that there is high content density.

➢ Most students (208 = 83,2%) gave two main reasons for their lack of participation in class: lack of confidence to use the new structures in context, and a strong feeling of shyness.

➢ A few students (53 = 21,2%) expressed that they were neither motivated by their teachers nor by the methodology implemented in class.

➢ Most of the students (205 = 82%) considered the class size as one of the factors that affected their learning. However, in spite of the high student-teacher ratio, they praised a positive learning environment.

➢ In general terms, our findings show that a great number of students (223 = 89,2%) were satisfied with the characteristics of the evaluation implemented in the subject. To refer to such characteristics, they used words such as *objective, clear, effective*. They added that, in general, they had received positive and effective feedback after getting the results of the term tests. However, a significant number of students (174 = 69,6%) complained about the lack of uniformity concerning the evaluation criteria.

➢ The majority of the students sampled (162 = 64,8) stated that they were satisfied with the grades they got in the exams. A few students (57 = 22,8%) reported that the grades they obtained did not reflect their knowledge on the topics. 44,8% of the students (112 respondents) claimed that, in some cases, their poor performance was not due to academic factors but rather to psychological conditions or feelings towards the exams, such as nervousness, anxiety, problems in concentration. They also admitted that their low performance was due to some physical factors, such as restlessness and fatigue.

➤ From our research findings, it was found that the students proposed a number of changes so as to improve the teaching and learning processes. The following suggestions are the ones that were mentioned more frequently:

- The implementation of office hours for those students who need special help.
- The application of innovative, stimulating teaching methods, such as the implementation of e-learning activities.
- The implementation of activities which reflect interdisciplinarity.
- The addition of more examples that illustrate the theory developed in the handout.
- The incorporation of diagrams and charts in the handout, so that they can resort to a summary of the main theoretical contents developed in class when they have to study or do the practice activities.
- The implementation of a training module or workshop on learning strategies.
- The implementation of mock exams so that they can be better equipped when they have to sit for the term tests and final exams.
- The implementation of self-check and assessment questions as well as terminal exercises in the course materials to clarify concepts furher and to provide opportunities for self-learners to assess their understanding on the content.
- The implementation of a uniform system of assessment criteria.

They also claim that teachers should:

- foster collaborative work, not competitive and isolated.
- provide the students with opportunities to perform in class and receive suggestions for improvement.
- to give them chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.
- to help them in effective time management, as they realised that using their own time efficiently is critical.

6.2. Analysis of the data collected from the teachers´ reports presented in the Office of Academic Affairs (Faculty of Languages, National University of Córdoba)

These reports were presented in the Office of Academic Affairs by the Head Professor, and the Adjunct Professor of the Chair of *English Grammar I* at the end of the academic year 2010. It must be clarified that this is a compulsory requirement. Such methodology was adopted some years ago as a rudimentary means of evaluating the teaching and learning processes of each study course in the Faculty of Languages. Such reports are also part of the existing legal framework in our Institution when any of the professors is evaluated through *Control de Gestión*.

Students´ Academic Performance

Group	Students enrolled in the subject at the beginning of the academic year 2010	Number of students who kept their good standing condition	Number of students who finished the subject as extra-mural or external students at the end of the academic year	Number of students who dropped out
A-B	128	95	12	21
C-D	126	92	10	24
E-F	51	22	10	19
G	23	5	5	13
Total	328	214	37	77

Taking the above, we can conclude that:

(i) 65% of the students enrolled in the subject during the academic year 2010 kept their good standing condition.

(ii) 11% of the students became extra-mural or external students.

(iii) 24% of the subjects enrolled in the subject dropped out during the academic year.

6.3. Analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire-survey administered to the teaching staff of the Chair of *English Grammar I*

In this section, we will analyse the data collected from the teachers´ questionnaire-survey. The questionnaire-survey was answered by all the teaching staff of the Chair, that is, the Head Teacher, the Adjunct Teacher, and two Teacher Assistants. These teachers were the ones who were in charge of conducting and evaluating the teaching and learning processes during the academic year 2010.

In the first section of the questionnaire-survey, the subjects had to answer some close-ended questions. Here follows the analysis of the collected data:

o As to the weekly hourly load officially established to develop the contents of the subjects, all teachers agreed that it was insufficient. Thus, they made the following proposals:
- To implement the use of TIC so that the students may have the chance of getting further theory and practice.
- To study the possibility of dealing with some of the contents which are currently part of the syllabus of *English Grammar I* (such as *inversion,* and *the expression of hypothetical meanings,* which could be fully exploited from the perspective of text grammar) in *English Grammar II* (3rd year)

o All the teaching staff agreed on the fact that within the first week of the academic timetable, they provided the students with information about:
- The course objetives.
- The course contents to be developed during the academic year, including a rationale for each unit.
- The metodology to be implemented during the academic year.
- Details about the obligatory and recommended bibliography.
- Assessment details, such as the nature of assessment tasks, weighting of each task and assessment criteria.
- Specific performance requirements as well as the consequences of failure to meet such requirements.
- A detailed timetable of topics and assessments dates.
- The role held by each of the members of the Chair.

o In general terms, the academic staff claimed that:

- In spite of the fact that the time alloted to the subject is not sufficient, they managed to develop all the disciplinary contents that they had proposed at the beginning of the academic year.

- They informed the students about the contents and type of practice activities that would be included in each exam.

- They stuck to the working schedule presented at the beginning of the academic year.

- They used the bibliography asked for when classes started.

- Most of the exercises were checked in class and students could clarify concepts.

- They stuck to the evaluation methodology and schedule proposed at the beginning of the academic year.

- Each of the members of the Chair held the role assigned at the beginning of the school year, in accordance with the nature of his post.

- They did not help, train or encourage the students to make use of different learning strategies as a way to enhance their learning process.

- They did not offer the students office hours.

In the next sub-section of the questionnaire-survey, the teaching staff were asked to evaluate each of the following aspects according to a scale that ranged from 1 (which indiacted the lowest level of personal appreciation) to 5 (which indicated the highest level of personal appreciation). The following chart illustrates the results:

Aspect to be evaluated	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
1. The classroom learning environment	4	4	4	5
2. The work environment	5	5	5	5
3. Materials quality	4	4	4	4
4. His own degree of commitment to the teaching and learning processes	4	5	5	5
5. Degree of knowledge acquired by the students at the end of the academic year	3	3	3	3
6. The student´s attitude towards the learning process	3	2	3	3

7. Relation between the time allotted to theory and practice	4	3	3	3
8. The degree of overlap between what is taught and what is tested	5	5	4	5
9. Complexity degree of the tests	4	3	3	4
10. Methodology implemented in the classroom	4	4	4	4
11. Degree of students´ participation in class when correcting the practice activities	3	2	3	2
12. Availability of teaching materials and resources	4	5	4	4

In the following chart, we present the findings concerning the way in which the academic staff of the Chair claimed to have conducted and evaluated the teaching and learning processes. This section of the questionnaire-survey includes Likert scales, which comprises three-response ratings of (i) *always*; (ii) *frequently*; and (iii) *never*.

During the academic year, I tried to:	Frequency		
	Always	**Frequently**	**Never**
1. make the students become interested in the topics dealt with in class.	----------------	4 teachers	....
2. answer the questions the students made in class.	1 teacher	3 teachers	....
3. inform the students about extra bibliography for them to get and do further practice activities.	1 teacher	2 teachers	1 teacher
4. comment on the most frequent errors made in the tests.	3 teachers	1 teacher	....
5. offer the students remedial teaching to compensate the shortcomings concerning the errors made in the tests.	3 teachers	1 teacher	....
6. offer weekly office hours.	....	....	4 teachers
7. offer extra practice activities mainly to consolidate the most difficult topics.	3 teachers	1 teacher	....
8. use innovative teaching materials and techniques.	....	4 teachers	....

Analysis of the teachers´ answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire-survey

Among the most frequent factors that lead to poor learning mentioned by the teaching staff, we can mention the following ones:

- The class size and high student-teacher ratio in groups A-B and C-D, which was in detriment of the quality of the teaching and learning processes.
- According to the teachers, the poor performance of the students is particularly evident in three areas: poor mastery of the structures taught during the course and in previous courses; lack of interest in learning; and lack of knowledge about and training in the use of effective learning strategies.
- the teaching staff also stated that there seems to be an important gap between university teaching practices – and what this implies - and the students´ previously acquired habits at high school.
- The low own personal engagement on the part of the students. The teachers feel that a great number of students are unwilling to study, do the homework, participate in class.
- The fact that students do not attend classes regularly caused them to have a poor performance in the learning process.
- The fact that learners had insufficient exposure to the language, as they do not use the language outside the classroom.
- In general, students demonstrate a low degree of initiative and responsible behaviour. Students did not actively participate in the learning process, neither did they contribute through appropriate behaviour to creating a focused learning environment.

The teaching staff were also asked about the main reasons why, in their opinion and on the bais of their experience teaching the subject for some years, students failed. Among such reasons, they claimed that, according to their experience and perception, most of the students who fail the exams:

- have a poor or bad study habit.
- suffer from a psychological condition - such as nervousness, anxiety, problems in concentration - before and during exams.
- do not do their homework; many of the students think they can understand or grasp the contents just by attending classes or reading the theory from the handout.

- neither assume their responsibility nor do they understand what being a university student means.
- do not manage their time properly.
- do not attend classes, which have a negative impact on their academic performance, as they feel disconnected with the course.
- copy their homework answers from their classmates´, which results in lack of practice.
- underestimate the subject.

When the teaching staff were asked about the reasons why some students drop out during the academic year, they stated that although some of the students often drop out because they are not academically prepared to attend the subject, there are other reasons that lead the students to abandon the educational process. In the first place, the teaching staff agree on the fact that there are two main kinds of factors regarding students´ dropout: those concerning the students themselves, and those related to the difficulty of study.

As regards the factors directly related to the students themselves, the teachers believe that one of the main causes of dropping out stems from a combination of adult learners´ obligations, specifically balancing their academic workload with their employment commitments and the family obligations. Another factor has to do with socio-economic problems: loss of wages, loss of employment. Besides, some students make an erroneous career choice which proves to be of no personal or professional interest and thus leads to their decision to discontinue their studies. There are some students who have low self-esteem or a strong fear of failing; the first time they fail an exam, they cannot cope with the situation and, consequently, they decide to stop attending classes. Loneliness negatively impacts on the students, as it may cause them to have a feeling of helplessness or think that studying is not valuable.

As to the factors related to the difficulty of study, the teaching staff state that the students enrolled in *English Grammar I* are required to work hard and allocate plenty of time for studying; there are some students who fail to recognize such demands throughout the school year. Besides, students tend to hold unrealistic views of the necessary time for effective studying and learning.

6.4. Summary of the strengths-opportunities detected through the analysis of the information collected

According to the information gathered at the end of the 2010 academic year, all the teaching staff of the Chair had been appointed to their posts after going through a public tender process; they were all carrying out post-graduate studies or had already got a postgraduate degree. It is worth pointing out that all the members of the Chair have a teaching degree which is directly related to the subject under focus in this study. Besides, all the staff first held the position of Professors-in-Training and/or Assistant Professors in the Chair, and then they got a post, which shows, on the one hand, how valuable it was for them to get a good academic training before applying for a post in the Chair and, on the other hand, their commitment to the institution. No doubt, such previous experience in the Chair translates into a positive influence on the quality of the teaching and learning processes.

During the academic year 2010, all the members of the staff took part in research projects approved by the SECyT of the UNC. The Head of the Chair was the director of a biannual research study for the academic period 2010-2011, which was directly related to the quality of the teaching and learning processes in the field of English grammar, and, consequently, to the subject matter of this investigation proper. The title of the research proyect was "Towards evaluation criteria uniformity in the field of English grammar". It is worth mentioning that the Teacher-Assistants of the Chair, the Teachers-in-Training, and the Student-Assistants of the Chair had an active participation as members in this investigation. Even though the Adjunt Professor of the Chair was not a member *per se* of the research proyect, as she was engaged in a different one, she actively colaborated with the research team, playing a decisive and key role.

We must point out that the *Formation of Human Resources* is one of the strengths of the chair; during the 2010 academic year, the Head Professor supervised and guided the activities of four Teachers-in-Training and five Student-Assistants.

Regarding the working atmosphere in the classroom, it was evaluated as highly positive by both teachers and students. In the same way, teachers assured that the working atmosphere among the members of the Chair was excellent, which was reflected on the absolute freedom with which they expressed and shared their ideas about the development of the teaching and learning processes implemented in the classroom with the other members of the Chair.

It was also observed that the members of the Chair had created an excellent relationship with the management staff of the Faculty of Languages in general and with the authorities of the Office of Academic Affairs in particular. Due to the fact that the latter definetely constitutes one of the areas that are closer and more sensitive to educational problems, the constant predisposition and willingness on the part of the authorities to solve and/or approach the different problems and inquiries that arose during the academic year, resulted in fast and efficient actions tending to guarantee the quality of the teaching and learning processes.

Another positive aspect that is worth highlighting is the fact that all the members of the Chair agreed that it was necessary that the final exam be the same for all the students. Consequently, they decided to design the same exam in order to unify criteria. In this way, given not only the structure of the Chair *English Grammar I* but also the number of students enrolled in this subject (There are four groups of students or *comisiones* and different lecturers in each of them), both the uniformity of criteria regarding the contents to be assessed and the methodology followed to assess such contents were guaranteed and shared by all the staff. Such a methodology implied that all the members of the Chair implemented the same kind of practice activities during the academic year.

The following aspects were evaluated as positive by the teachers:
- The quality of the study materials used to teach the subject.
- Their own level of commitment to the teaching and learning processes.
- The balance between the kind of practical activities included in the study material, which were done and/or checked in class, and the kind of exercises included in the tests.
- The availability of technological/didactic resources in the classrooms.

It is clear from our research that:
- Teachers tried, in general, to make their students become interested in the topics.
- All teachers stated that they *always* answered the students' questions.
- In general, teachers claimed that they usually pointed out the most recurring mistakes made in the tests to the whole class and then referred to possible ways of correcting them.
- The teachers implemented consolidation exercises, especially concerning those topics that, according to their perception, had posed greater difficulties to their students.

Another aspect to highlight is the fact that the teaching staff valued quite positively the fact that they had been granted absolute liberty on the part of the Head Professor regarding the following aspects:

- the choice of teaching-learning methods/techniques.
- the possibility of making decisions in relation to the order in which the theoretical and practical contents of the current syllabus were taught.
- the possibility of designing and implementing extra practice activities according to students´ needs.
- the design and preparation of mid-term tests.
- the design and administration of practical tasks.
- the design, selection and/or compilation of the didactic materials.
- the selection of further bibliography.

Regarding the students' perception in relation to the positive aspects of the teaching and learning processes implemented in the Chair of *English Grammar I* during the 2010 academic year, most students stated that their teachers:

- had informed them, at the beginning of the academic year, about the objectives; the theoretical and practical contents; the assessment methodology and criteria; the minimum required bibliography; the type of exercises that would be included in the tests, and the schedule of activities.
- during the academic year, teachers respected the activities that had been scheduled;
- had developed the entire syllabus and had checked most of the assigned practical activities.
- had stuck to the methodology as well as the role assigned at the beginning of the year to each one of the members of the teaching staff of the Chair.

Most of the students considered that the following aspects fostered the quality of the teaching and learning processes:

- the working atmosphere in the classroom;
- the quality of the didactic materials used to teach the theoretical and practical contents. They give a positive assessment to the fact thay the handout includes both the theoretical framework for each topic and a sufficient number of practice activities;
- the level of commitment shown by teachers regarding their work;

- the clarity of their professors when teaching the different topics;

- the academic education of the staff;

- the balance achieved regarding the ratio of time devoted to the development of the theoretical contents and their practical implementations;

- the degree of correspondence between the kind of practice activities included in the study material, which was done and/or checked in class, and the kind of exercises included in the mid-term tests and practical assignments.

- the teaching methodology implemented throughout the course.

Furthermore, most of the students who answered the questionnaire-survey agreed on the fact that the teachers:

- were permanently willing to answer their questions;

- provided feedback about the most recurring mistakes made in the tests and gave explanations about how to correct those mistakes.

- carried out consolidation exercises before the tests to practise those topics or structures that posed greater difficulties.

- assessed the students only on the topics dealt with in class.

6.5. Summary of the weaknesses-threats detected through the analysis of the information collected and solution proposals.

Problem detected:

In spite of what is claimed in the syllabus of the subject, there is general agreement among the teaching staff of the Chair of *English Grammar I* that there is too much an emphasis on developing grammar competence in detriment of communicative competence. Hence, even if students are taught complex grammatical structures, they fail at actively engaging in meaningful communication.

Solution proposal:

Shifting towards a communicative competence model, striking a balance between *form* and *meaning* so that learners can activate the language they have learned when using it in communicative activities.

In spite of the fact that in the current syllabus it is stated that *form* and *meaning* will be given the same importance in the teaching and learning process, this does not seem to be what happens in reality. Through the data gathered in the questionnaire-surveys and the analysis of the syllabus and teaching materials, we can conclude that the course mainly focuses on the study of grammar (Carter and Long, 1991: 3), that is, it emphasises the acquisition of knowledge *about* grammar. In other words, the methodology implemented seems to aim mostly at making learners familiar with a number of structures that will eventually help them to build up sentences in English without paying too much attention to communicative meaning. This usually results in bored, disaffected students who can produce correct forms on the practice activities and in the tests, but consistently make errors when they try to use the language in context.

It is a common held belief among linguists and EFL language teachers that learners are often frustrated by the disconnection between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply those rules automatically in listening, speaking, reading and writing. This disconnection reflects a separation between *declarative knowledge* (knowledge *about* something), which enables a student to describe a rule of grammar and apply it in pattern practice drills, and *procedural knowledge* (knowledge *of how to do* something), which enables a student to apply a rule of grammar in communication.

Although it is true that teaching and learning grammar is necessary for the students to use the language accurately, mainly at university and / or professional level, it is essential to change the current approach, as the benefits of exclusively focusing on a structural-grammatical methodology seem to be overshadowed by some problems.

Furthermore, if, as it is stated in the current syllabus of the subject, the Chair´s assumptions about the nature of language learning is one of "language as communication" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 69), then a syllabus based around activities and tasks that foster real and meaningful communication appears to be advantageous. Evidence shows that even if in this course students are taught structural rules to a surprisingly complex degree, they are not provided with enough opportunities to use the language learned in meaningful contexts. Consequently, the theory that learning is facilitated by activities that include real communication may be the most suitable one to adopt in this subject.

Thus, it is vital that the academic staff work towards developing the students´ communicative competence. Communicative competence is usually defined as the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. This means that EFL learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current

proficiency to the fullest. They should try to avoid confusion in the message (due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary); to avoid using socially inappropriate style; and to use strategies for recognising and managing communication breakdowns.

Hence, the teaching staff of the Chair should work towards developing the four competences areas or components that make up communicative competence:

- Linguistic competence, that is, how to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language.
- Sociolinguistic competence, that is, how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating.
- Discourse competence, that is, how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole.
- Strategic competence, that is, how to recognise and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one´s knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language and the context.

Due to all the reasons stated in this section, it is paramount that there be a shift concerning the current teaching method. Consequently, the *Focus on Form* method, as opposed to a *Focus on forms* approach, seems to be the most suitable one to meet our students´ needs. Originally, Focus on Form is put forward by Long (1991: 45-46), who states "[…] focus on form […] overtly draws student´s attention to linguistic elements as they rise incidentally in lessons whose overrriding focus is on meaning or communication". Besides, Long & Robinson (1998: 23) explains that "Focus on form often consists of an accasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and/or one or more students-triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production".

As the *Focus on Form* method deals with all three elements of language acquisition: form, meaning and function at the same time, this method provides an effective approach for language learning for classroom use. Thus, it may help learners acquire both grammatical and communicative competence.

Problem detected:

The study course is exclusively based on a systematic presentation of the elements of the linguistic system of the language without paying any attention to meaning and function.

Solution proposal:

Implementing a well-balanced syllabus which comprises a blend of structural and functional elements.

After having analysed the current syllabus of the subject, we can draw the conclusion that its layout resembles that of a grammatical syllabus. As to the approach to teaching and assessing the contents, it is product-oriented, which was corroborated when we analysed the teaching materials and the mid-term tests.

A grammatical syllabus refers to the syllabus in which grammatical criteria are used to break the global language into discrete units. The items are graded according to the grammatical complexity and simplicity of the items, their frequency, their contrastive difficulty in relation to the learners´ first language, situational need, and pedagogic convenience (Wilkins, 1976).

Zhuanglin (2000: 25) defines the grammatical syllabus as "a grammar oriented syllabus based on a selection of language items and structures. The vocabulary and grammatical rules included in the teaching material are carefully ordered according to factors such as frequency and usefulness".

Among the merits of a grammatical syllabus, we can say that it is "economic". In natural learning, such as learning one´s first language, the amount of time and motivation devoted to learning is great. However, in classroom study, there is very much less time available. Therefore, learning time should be organised carefully and efficiently, which implies designing a syllabus that allows teachers to present all the different contents one after the other for gradual, systematic acquisition. It also means preparing an organised, balanced plan of classroom teaching/learning procedures through which the learners will be enabled to spend some of their time concentrating on mastering one or more of the components of the target language on their way to acquiring it as a whole. A further advantage is that a grammatical syllabus is highly "systematic", as language is produced in accordance with a complex system of rules. Finally, it is easy to evaluate how learners go on with their learning, as the evaluation criteria are simpler than that of other types of syllabuses.

As to the drawbacks of a grammatical syllabus, we can point out that it tries to focus on only one aspect of language, that is, formal grammar. We know that in reality there is more than one aspect of language. Ouside the classroom, language matters tend to complicate, not only by the fact that language fulfills a variety of communicative functions, but by the fact that there is no one-to-one relationship between form and function: a form can realise more than one function and a function can be realised by more than one form.

A grammatical syllabus focuses learning on the core and not on the distribution of that in particular uses. As a result, even the learner who knows the core may not be able to communicate adequately when he finds himself in a situation requiring knowledge.

According to Wilkins (1976: 8):

> One danger in basing a course on a systematic presentation of the elements of linguistic structure is that forms will tend to be taught because they are there, rather than for the value which they will have for the learner.

In other words, it gives too much attention to the form in detriment of the meaning. Wilkins (1976: 89) adds that:

> One characteristic of grammatical syllabuses is that what has to be learned is identified as a form and rarely as a set of meanings. Most syllabuses are in fact an inventory of grammatical forms. It is very rare for grammatical meanings also to be specified. The assumption seems to be that form and meaning are in one-to-one relation.

Nunan (1991) states that there is a strong belief among EFL language teachers that language consists of a finite set of rules which can be combined in various ways to make meaning. It is further assumed that these rules can be learned one by one, in an additive fashion, each item being mastered on its own before being incorporated into the learner´s pre-existing stock of knowledge. In this view, it is believed that learning is a cummulative process by which learners acquire the units they are taught regardless of whether they are ready to learn them. However, as Long (2000: 184) points out "teachability is constrained by learnability. The idea that what you teach is what they learn, and that when you teach it is when they learn it, is not just simplistic: it is wrong". Hence, no matter how commonsensical a decision about what structure to teach and when to teach it is, different learners will be ready to learn different parts of the language at different times.

This parallels the theory of language learning that Rutherford (1987) terms "accumulated entities", where language is treated as a body of knowledge to be acquired. Rutherford (1987: 4) states that "the second language learner begins at point zero, and is taught individual entities of the target language one at a time in a predetermined linear sequence until the language is mastered". The accumulated entities view pairs well with the Present, Practice and Produce (PPP) methodology implemented in the study course under focus in this study: a specific grammatical structure is isolated and presented to the learners, followed by a teacher-controlled practice stage, and ending with a freer production stage (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental flaw with the structural-grammatical syllabus and PPP methodology, as research has shown that language is not acquired in a clear-cut linear fashion and that students do not simply learn the language that the teacher presents to them (Rutherford & Smith, 1988; Skeehan, 1998). In this regard, Corder´s (1967, cited in Ellis, 1993: 92) suggestion that learners have a "built-in syllabus", which determines when grammatical features can be acquired, has been supported by several empirical studies (Felix, 1981; Ellis, 1984, 1989; Pienemann, 1989). However, the idea of presenting items one at a time contradicts the fact that syntactic structures interact in highly complex ways (McLaughlin, 1990).

Also, evidence in second language acquisition has shown that treating learners as a homogeneous group is unrealistic, since different rates of development in certain syntactic and morphological domains is a reality. In addition, there is not enough information about the developmental stages for every structure in English to base our grading decisions on such information.

A process-oriented syllabus, on the other hand, focuses on the learning experience itself (Nunan, 1988). The learner is required to analyse language in a more natural and holistic environment aiming to "approximate his own linguistic behaviour more and more closely to the global language" (Wilkins, 1976: 2).

In the last couple of decades (especially in the 90´s), the emergence of task-based learning teaching (TBLT) has given rise to a position which claims to be between the *focus on forms*, which almost exclusively concentrates on language structures, and *focus on meaning*, which completely or almost completely rejects any attention to form. Long (2000), one of the major advocates of the *Focus on form* method, claims that TBLT tries to capture the strengths of analytical syllabuses at the same time he deals with its shortcomings.

According to Willis & Willis (1998: 41), the emergent popularity of the process approach to syllabus design, and task-based approach in particular, originates in the "limitations of the PPP model". Nunan (1988: 41) adds that the task-based approach emerges as a result of "the realization that specifying functions and notions would not in itself lead to the development of communicative language skills". In the task-based approach, a task is something that is done rather than said (Long & Crookes, 1993), with meaning as its primary focus (Skeehan, 1996). Willis (1996: 53) defines *task* as

> […] a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome […] learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game, or share and compare experiences.

Rabbini (2002: 154) argues that "from a communicative perspective, the task-based approach is more effective than product-oriented designs, as it promotes real and meaningful communication among learners". Essentially, tasks "call upon and engage the same abilities which underline communication itself" (Breen, 1987: 161). As a result, the question concerning "what" becomes subordinate to the question "how". The focus shifts from the linguistic element to the pedagogical one, with an emphasis on learning. Within such framework, the selection, ordering, and grading of content is no longer the only significant criterion to be considered by the syllabus designer. By arranging the syllabus around tasks such as information- and opinion-gap activities, it is hoped that the learner will perceive the language subconsciously while consciously concentrating on solving the meaning behind the tasks. In a task-based approach, *Focus on form* is expected to take place in overridingly meaning-based instruction. As Prabhu´s (1987: 2) puts it, "grammar construction by the learner is an unconscious process which is best facilitated by bringing about in the learner a preoccupation with meaning, saying and doing".

The notion of basing an approach on how learners learn was proposed by Breen & Candlin (1987). Here the emphasis lays with the learner, who, it is hoped, will be involved in the implementation of the syllabus design as far as that is practically possible. By being fully aware of the objectives, contents, methodology and materials of the course they are studying, it is believed that their interest and motivation will increase, coupled with the positive effect of nurturing the skills required to learn.

However, despite the fact that the task-based approach better reflects Halliday´s (1975) social process of "learning how to mean" when compared to the structural-

grammatical approach, Skeehan (1996; 1998) warns against the exclusive use of communicative tasks, which can lead to fossilization and an over-reliance use of communication strategies. Stressing the need for learners to be focused on both language-as-form and language-as-meaning, Skeehan (1996: 30) points out that a disproportionate focus on one can lead to an overreliance on the other, and hence, in order to foster balanced language development, it is essential that task-based activities include form-focused ones:

> An excessive focus on meaning during task completion runs the risk of learners becoming confined to the strategic solutions they develop without sufficient focus for structural change or accuracy. An excessive focus on form will not push the learners to integrate structure into effective on-going communication.

Currently, there is general consensus that a well-balanced communicative syllabus needs to encompass elements of both *process*, in the form of meaningful communication, and *product*, in the form of units of meaning (Wilkins, 1981; Willis, 1990, 2003; Long and Crookes, 1992; Ellis, 1993, 2006; Long, 2000). Recent developments in the broad field of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have seen a call by language experts for a shift towards the middle of the product-process continuum (Wilkins, 1981, Long, 2000, Willis, 2003; Ellis, 2006).

In this regard, Brown (1995: 14) states that "there is nothing wrong with the complexity that results from mixing syllabuses." Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 51) remark that "it is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful from each theory and confiding also in the evidence of your own experience as a teacher".

Yalden (1987) has proposed a hybrid dynamic type of syllabus known as *proportional syllabus*. Wilkins (1976: 2) described analytic and synthetic syllabi as proportional. Syllabi that bolster second language curricula are never completely analytic or synthetic in nature. According to Yalden (1987), there are three principles that can inform syllabus design: (i) a view of how language is *learned*, which could result in a structure-based syllabus, (ii) a view of how language is *acquired*, which would result in a process-based syllabus; and (iii) a view of how language is *used*, which would result in a function-based syllabus. By integrating all three, Yalden proposes a proportional syllabus, with a semantic-grammatical organizational base, a linguitic component based on language functions, and topics based on learners´ interests.

In Yalden´s proportional syllabus, the focus shifts from linguitic form to communicative function as the course progresses. There is an initial "structural phase", which concentrates on formal and ideational meaning. "Communicative phases" follow, in which functional, discoursal and rhetorical components are added. Finally, there is a "specialized phase", in which specialized content and the surface structure of the language are emphasized. Yalden (1987: 100) states that a proportional syllabus "is designed to be dynamic, not static, with ample opportunity for feedback and flexibility".

As Yalden observes, it is important for a syllabus to indicate explicitly what will be taught, not what will be learned. This practical approach, with its focus on flexibility and a spiral method of language sequencing leading to the recycling of language, seems relevant for learners who lack exposure to the target language beyond the classroom (Rabbini, 2002).

According to Yalden (1987: 81), the benefits of a proportional syllabus are that "it overcomes the problem of reconciling functional and structural demands and offers a close interweaving of structural and nonstructural, syatematic and nonsystematic elements over time". In other words, a proportional syllabus assumes a mid-way position between the diametric extremes of product oriented synthetic syllabi and process-oriented analitic syllabi.

The proportional syllabus will focus on acquiring both the language and the ability to use the language. Thus, a hybrid syllabus based on both theoretical and practical considerations will probably result in a compromise which satisfies the needs of most language learners. In view of what has been stated above, and given the nature of the study course under focus as well as the lack of exposure to the target language ouside the classroom, we believe that a proportional syllabus may well constitute a valuable insight into designing a syllabus that really meets the students´ needs.

Problem detected:

There is a reduced implementation of Communication and Information Technology (CIT) as a methodological-pedagogical resource.

Solution proposal:

To set up, in a natural way, a new scenario in the relationship between teachers, students and the theoretical and practical contents of the subject *English Grammar I* through CIT as a strategy to innovate teaching and improve learning.

Through the data gathered in the questionnaire-surveys, it was found that several students expressed the need to include additional practice activities through CIT. Most of the students really valued this option as a tool to strengthen the theoretical and practical contents taught in class. Likewise, the academic staff of the Chair showed great interest and willingness to gradually incorporate CITs to their teaching practices.

Students´ remarks about the need to incorporate CITs to the classroom as a means of improving the quality of the teaching and learning processes is closely related to the fact that 47% of the students sampled believed that the time alloted to the subject (four periods of 40 minutes each per week) was not enough in relation to the amount of theoretical and practical contents to be developed in class. When asked: *How would you solve this difficulty?*, the second mostly chosen proposal by the students was "by using digital technology (virtual classroom, e-mails, forums, blogs, etc.)"

It is worth mentioning that only 12 students, that is 4,8% of the respondents, reported that they would solve the problem "by eliminating some contents of the syllabus", which shows the importance that students give to the contents of the course. Additionally, this shows the students´ level of maturity, pedagogically speaking, since most of them chose the use of different techniques to methodologically overcome the problem mentioned above.

In this regard, it is necessary to point out that grammar as a science tries to know and explain the general rules that describe the functioning of a language. The grammar system of a language is a theoretical reconstruction designed to describe and explain the functioning of the linguistic system, which entails recognizing, through formal criteria, units of analysis, backing up the rules proposed in general terms, expressly connecting the different components of the linguistic description. While traditional grammar provides for an excellent basis for reflecting on the mechanisms operating in the linguistic system, modern grammar considered this necessary knowledge within a wider and more demanding theoretical framework.

However, as we have already stated, the main aim of language teaching in our particular context is that the student is able to express himself, both orally and in writing, fluently and accurately, to understand texts and to defend his arguments in a coherent and efficient way. Therefore, all our efforts should be aimed at actions that enable the student to reach the necessary cognitive level to improve his communicative skills in the foreign language.

We believe that the student should be the protagonist of his own training; students learn by doing, researching and experiencing. Thus, considering the underlying dynamics in the development of disciplinary contents of the subject *English Grammar I*, we believe that CIT can turn a very useful tool to develop students' cognitive skills, favour a team-work approach, explore, deepen, analyse and assess learning contents, improve problem solving skills, increase motivation and interest for the subject, strengthen self-esteem and provide learning autonomy.

Virtual Learning presents learners with what may be new demands and new opportunities for self-direction, as they are faced with numerous decisions that may previously have been made for them by the teacher in the formal learning environment. In such a context, they need to be able to assume more responsibility and control in identifying learning goals, in developing awareness of the learning process and directing their learning experiences. However, we believe that it is wrong to assume that the virtual mode *per se* gives rise to learner autonomy. To exercise independence, learners must enjoy freedom to explore and make choices; they must have a sufficient level of proficiency to carry out learning activities and appropriate support. According to White (2003: 151), "learner independence needs to be underpinned by the elements of learner proficiency and support, which together constitute the nature of control within the learning environment".

Hence, in order to prepare learners effectively for learner independence, we agree with Allwright (1981) and Banton (1992) that teachers themselves need preparing for what is in effect a deeper involvement with the people they help to learn.

As Garrett puts it (1991: 74), "[...] the use of a computer is not a method itself, but a means in which a great variety of methods, approaches and pedagogical philosophies can be included". To put it in other words, CIT-assisted language learning effectiveness does not depend on the means itself, but on the ways they are used. In this regard, as Carneiro (2006) points out, when CITs are introduced to education, we have to be careful not to take it as a utilitarian or technocratic approach, lacking ethical commitments, as it will make us miss our education priorities and take mere imported trends. According to Ahmad et al (1985: 10), the computer "is not a self-sufficient means of language teaching, but rather a valuable aid which should take its place alongside other already established devices for helping the langauge learner".

Incorporating CITs as didactic-pedagogic strategies will work as a starting point to carry out a change from traditional methodology, allowing the students to go through the

learning process in a deductive manner being freer to choose how much content they want to learn and the pace to process it.

For this purpose, we suggest using the *Moodle* platform, since as an open code *online* course manager and as a computer and telematic organized tool planned according to the teaching objectives, it allows the teacher to arrange an education community, where students are active participants of their own learning processes, through collaboration and cooperation to build knowledge. In addition, its structure in modules makes it possible to adjust it to the actual needs of each area or discipline and even to each training schedule. *Moodle* features a series of different technologies organized as resources: files, directories, links to Web pages or to external sites of the platform. It also allows students to carry out activities individually, such as designing exercises generated from *hotpotatos* (application to design cross words; exercises to join clauses; option or multiple choice exercises; exercises where the user has to complete sentences with the grammar units indicated; sort out the elements of a sentences; etc.), loading voice files from the *nonogong* application, or group activities such as *wikis* and glossaries facilitating the contextualization of learning and authentic communication.

Furthermore, this education platform allows us to sort exercises according to their level of difficulty, making it possible for students to move gradually from one level to the other. Also, by resorting to this type of pedagogical tools, learners have the opportunity to select their own path through the material according to their preferences, progress and need for further practice and revision.

Moodle includes multiple activities that students perform independently, that is, without the presence or direct intervention of the teacher and which works as a practical support for the different traditional activities. In addition, exercises have some tips in order to carry them out. These tips are given as correction and self-assessment mechanisms that serve as feedback for the interaction between the tutor and the user indicated: students can check whether the answers are correct or not while at the same time know about the score obtained in each exercise.

Feedback plays a crucial role for distance language learners, not only as a response to their performance but also as a means of providing support, encouragement and motivation to continue practising. Thus, continuous monitoring and feedback from the teacher is essential. Feedback is also an important part of the ongoing teacher-learner relationship, as it contributes to how the learners sees the role of the teacher in this mode.

Carnwell (1999) states that feedback should be the basis of, and should encourage, dialogue between the teacher and the learner. Following these lines, Hyland (2001: 237) points out that feedback within a Distance Mode should be related to two broad categories: the product (i.e. the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment itself), and learning process (i.e. the strategies and actions the students should take to improve their language).

Finally, we would like to point out that our Faculty has a Distance Education Department whose main objective is to provide an alternative to traditional education. Through the "Department of Communication and Information Technology for Language Training" (ATICEL, per the Spanish acronym), the institution provides us with the necessary counselling to carry out this kind of activities. This department has, but is not limited to, the following objectives: "encouraging innovation for the incorporation of language teaching methodologies and techniques", and "providing counselling services for the incorporation, maintenance and assessment of people, equipment and programmes related to relevant CITs".

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that our Chair counts on the help of Teacher-Assistants, Teachers-in-Training and Student-Assistants, who can eventually be in charge of designing the materials and monitoring the students´ performance in the virtual classroom.

Problem detected:

Lack of a formative assessment, which prevents the teachers from assessing the students' intermediate behaviours in order to discover whether and how the partial goals proposed have been accomplished.

Solution proposal:

Implementing a formative assessment system in order to have a wider view of the difficulties and progress of students, and adjust, if necessary, the teaching and learning processes.

Although it is widely known that the assessment system at the general education scheme, and specially at university, implies certain formal or legal requirements to be met, which we cannot ignore, it is also true that there is nothing preventing us from carrying out a formative assessment during the academic year in order to gather information about the teaching and the learning processes.

No doubt, it is high time we explored new ways of assessing our students, which eventually lead us to mirror the students´ learning, understanding, achievements, motivation and attitude in a comprehensive way; in other words, it is essential that we assess the academic performance of our students in such a way that we focus not only on quantitative aspects but also on qualitative ones. This will allow us to assess the development of the teaching and learning processes with the ultimate goal of making necessary adjustments and reorganize the actions taken both by teachers and students.

In this regard, the typical written exam as the only method for measuring student progress is widely criticized by authors like Barberá (2007: 123), who argues that assessment should not be a mere data gathering process but

> a process that facilitates group analysis and the reconstruction of learning through shared interpretation of the data gathered by the teacher and the students. In these terms, the assessment process will be completed with a series of actions that are the main responsibility of the teacher and that will be ignored if assessment is understood as a diagnosis of students' knowledge.

Barberá (2007) describes these actions as:
a) decision making regarding learning on the basis of the results obtained (what to do, how to continue) in the mid term tests or final exam;
b) the actual realization of these decisions – many a time given as granted just because it was indicated or because its scope is not considered real; and
c) a follow up of the development of the decisions made, which will result in an assured and true progressive learning.

In this context, *portfolios* may become an efficient procedure within alternative assessment (Martín, 1997). This system consists of a set of activities developed by the students, gathered throughout time, which can provide evidence of their knowledge, skills and even of their decision to take actions in different ways. The portfolio is a sample of the work of the student that is comprehensive enough to generate a representation of how he is doing it. This enables teachers to have a global and comprehensive sample of their students´ learning process and hence avoid judging the process only by means of a fragmented or non-continuous assessment. Portfolio assessment has been defined as "[…] the evaluation of a collected, organised, annotated body of work, produced over time by a learner, which demonstrates progress toward specific objectives" (Barnhardt, Kevorkian & Delett, 1997: 3).

Hence, we propose the portfolio system, also known as the *work portfolio* or *work dossier,* as an interesting and innovating complimentary alternative to traditional assessment. In the educational field, the portfolio system was at first nothing but a folder with a series of achievements and certifications of the students with promotional purposes. As time went by, this assessment procedure was developed including curriculum data of the student. The point of inflection was its use with instruction purposes.

An advantage of this instrument is that it can provide evidence of growth in a number of different dimensions of learning. In other words, the portfolio entails a useful tool in the English grammar field, since it features materials that show the students' progress, the level of understanding of the contents and their ability to develop new skills. Actually, the portfolio firstly enables the instructors to integrate the learning process tasks with assessment; secondly, it helps to assess students' achievements and their level of autonomy; and finally, it provides the teacher with more information on students' efforts and their compliance with all the tasks assigned.

Therefore, work portfolios show the whole learning process and it shows how, when, where, and to what extent the concepts, skills and competencies have been acquired by the students. As Martín (1997) puts it, the information included in the portfolio generates a whole assessment picture about the skills, competencies, knowledge, readiness to act and the actual willingness of the students.

The portfolio is not simply a qualitative and comprehensive assessment strategy; in English grammar, this tool may also serve the purpose of filing documents: practical works, the works asked for and corrected by the teacher; term tests; etc.; it may also work as a portfolio of the process: all the works performed on a specific topic may be compiled.

The portfolio is also a work and assessment strategy during the teaching and learning processes, accompanying and helping the teacher in the instruction planning and design activities (Delmastro, 2005: 196). Even if each teacher can decide how to implement this system according to their classroom activity, most authors agree on describing three phases or stages in its implementation: a previous stage of information and preparation for the experience; a development and follow up stage; and a last stage of final presentation, closing and assessment of the experience.

During the preparation stage, the teacher will inform the students about the characteristics of the portfolio, the general guidelines, contents to include and the criteria for assessment of said contents. Then, the teacher will explain the second stage: development and follow up. At this point, students will be informed about the

methodology they will work with and what role the portfolio will play in it. In addition, the teacher will present a schedule with activities, will explain how such activities will be carried out, and how participation in class will be assessed; also, students will be guided as to the way in which the different materials will be used and their correction; it is at this stage when the process starts to receive feedback, guiding those students that have more difficulties and following up all students in their learning process. At the end of the course, students will be able to present their portfolios with all the activities done during the course; each portfolio will work as proof of the learning process that each individual has gone through during the academic year.

Portfolios can prove a quite meaningful source for providing information that can be most useful for teaching and learning. This information becomes the evidence of the students´ language proficiency based on a broader representation of agents and materials which together engage in a process of contextualization by obtaining evidence from a different source than the final examinations.

Through constructive, interpretative and dialogical sessions, each participant collects language data and demonstrates them in an interpretative and contextualized manner. Although this practice may result a little time consuming, it may prove quite useful, since each student will be able to maintain a portfolio that will include his personal goals and objectives, self-assessments, teacher assessments, and all practice activities carried out during the course.

The implementation of the portfolio also highlights the importance of providing high quality feedback on performance to learners. Without feedback on their performance, learners can think they have mastered something when they have not, can fossilize in errors, become discouraged, or resent the effort they have put in. Thus, we intend to encourage learners to monitor and record significant moments in their experience of the course. This aim is in harmony with the goals of autonomous learning, in that it encourages students to take an active role in formulating their learning objectives and assessing to what extent these have been met.

An important dimension in language learning is students´ development of apprpriate learning strategies. However, traditional tests do not capture these mental processes. Because learning strategies are most often not observable phenomena, teachers need to rely on students´ own reports about the strategies they have used. Implementing the use of the portfolio in the grammar class as an alternative form of assessment, students could

record a summary of the strategies they have used when accomplishing a particular poractice activity.

The students´ work samples collected on regular basis throughout the school year will allow teachers to gain an opportunity to truly understand what their students are learning. As products of significant instructional activity, portfolios reflect contextualized learning and complex thinking skills, not simple routine, low level congnitive activity. Portfolios should aim at making sense of students´work, communicating about their work, and relating the work to a larger context.

To sum up, current trends in the assessment of student learning recommend that alternative forms of assessment, rather than stardardized tests alone, be used to assess students´ progress in school achievement. One increasingly favoured approach to alternative assessment is the use of portfolios to gather chronological indices of student learning. Although teachers will have to devote some valuable class time to develop, implement and score portfolios, we are convinced that the implementation of this instrument will become a useful asset, as their use has proved to have positive consequences for both teaching and learning; apart from showing the progress the student is making or has made in reaching the instructional goals of the course, its implementation can help increase the student´s ability to learn, his learning efficiency and his motivation to learn.

Problem detected:

The methodology currently implemented in the Chair of *English Grammar I* usually lead students to have difficulty in acquiring new uses of structural patterns: once a structure has been learned in a particular way and in a particular context, the tendency is to feel that that structure has been "captured", "pigeonholed", and that no further learning effort is needed.

Solution proposal:

Making the students value the advantages of *corpus linguistics* and instilling in them an awareness of what really happens in the language as well as a curiosity to find out more: to go beyond the somehow simplistic language used in the teaching material and in the classroom, and to discover how native speakers of English in the real world express themselves in their speech and writing.

Wikins (1972: 111) claims that "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". Along these lines, Modern Corpus Linguistics (CL) has played a major role in reshaping our view and understanding of how language operates within real social communication and has influenced almost every area of linguistics, applied linguistics, and language related resources. So much so that it is quite frequent nowadays to find dictionaries and reference grammar textbooks that claim to be "corpus-based" (O´Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter, 2007: XI).

Great efforts are being made to communicate the benefits of CL in the classroom (Johns, 1994; Sinclair, 2004; Gavioly, 2005; O´Keeffee, McCarthy & Carter, 2007). Gavioly (2005) claims that many teachers are unaware of the benefits of using corpora in the classroom and thus fail to see their relevance for teaching and learning. However, there is a "frequent mismatch between corpus linguistics research and what goes into materials and resources, and what goes on in the langauge classroom" (O´Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter, 2007: XI).

Corpus linguistics is the common practice of compiling linguistic corpora, or large and principled collections of natural spoken and written texts in order to analyse by computer patterns of language use in large databases of authentic texts. This corpus-based information is of great interest to language educators, since information on the distribution and frequency of grammar points help provide an empirical basis for determining which learning points to teach or to test.

Among some of the advantages of corpus linguisics, we can say that it provides data about frequency of occurrence and distribution; it provides information on the different semantic functions of lexical items; it provides distributional and frequency information on the lexico-grammatical features of the language or those features that could be taken as both lexiacl and grammatical.

According to Bird (2005: 545), corpus linguitics involves the development and use of collections of spoken or written texts in computer readable format. These corpora are then analysed to reveal patterns of usage; for example, words that are frequently used together, grammatical patterns in particular types of writing or speech, and other unifying patterns observed in the corpus. The analysis of large samples of various types of English, both spoken and written, and in numerous genres is revolutionasing our understanding of how the resources of English (its vocabulary and grammar) are distributed among different discourse types.

No doubt, a central element of language teaching is that of grammar. Corpus linguistics allows EFL teachers to answer questions such as: Is the grammar that is taught really the grammar of the language? Are the preoccupations of the coursebooks as important in real life as they are in the classroom?

Grammar, like vocabulary, varies markedly according to context, allowing speakers considerable choice in the expression of interpersonal meanings (that is, meanings realised in relation to who one is speaking to rather than just what one is saying). A carefully constructed and balanced corpus can help to differentiate between different choices relative to how much knowledge speakers assume, what kind of relationship they have or what to have, etc.

Frequency information allows teachers to focus on the most common structural patterns, ensuring that students know and can actively use them. It is equally important to know which patterns are infrequent, as less learning effort need usually be expended on them. Corpus data allows us to see not only which items are most and least frequent, but also how they are distributed across speech and writing and across different registers.

Studies of language can be divided into two main areas: studies of structure and studies of use. Traditionally, linguistic analyses have emphasized structure (Identifying the structural units and classes of language) and describing how smaller units can be combined to form larger grammatical units.

A different perspective is to emphasize language use. From this perspective, we can investigate how speakers and writers exploit the resources of their language. Rather than looking at what is theoretically possible in a language, we study the actual language used in naturally occurring texts.

Many studies of language use focus on a particular linguistic structure, investigating the ways in which seemingly similar structures occur in different contexts and serve different functions. For example, in English *that – verb – complement* and *ing – verb – complement* clauses are similar in their structural characteristics and can be similar in meaning, as in the following sentences:

(i) I suggest that we should go there.

(ii) I suggest going there.

In addition, the subordinating conjunction can be omitted in that clauses:

(iii) I suggest Ø we should go there.

A structural analysis would describe the grammatical similarities and differences among these three sentences. All three options are equally grammatical ways to complete

the meaning of the verb. However, an analysis of language use goes beyond traditional grammatical description to ask why the language should have multiple structures that are similar in their meaning and grammatical function.

Answers to this question should consider a range of factors. For instance, do spoken varieties versus written varieties have different preferences for one of the forms over others? How can we find the patterns in the language used in conversation, newspapers, academic prose, personal letters, etc.?

The corpus-based approach provides a means of handling large amounts of language and keeping tract of many contextual factors at the same time. Besides, a corpus-based approach allows us to identify and analyse complex "association patterns": the systematic ways in which linguistic features are used in association with other linguistic and non-linguistic features.

Teachers usually give their students a number of strategies for coping with the structures of the language. In doing this, concordances play a fundamental role. In this way, students are shown how to look carefully at the particular bit of language being focused on, and what are the reasons for its use. Furthermore, the focus is not merely on a particular structure itself, but on the contexts in which such structure is being used.

Concordances, for example, can help the learners study how words are actually used in context. The words or phrases a student may be interested in are displayed in a vertical arrangement on the computer screen along with their surrounding co-text: we can see what came just before the word and what came just after. Whether we want to present or practise a morphological feature, a syntactic structure, or some kind of lexico-grammatical association, a concordance can provide an effective way of getting the students actively involved. A concordance gives us a code on the right of the screen which tells us what type of conversation each line occurs in, and leads us to the corpus data base where we can verify who the speakers are, what age, gender, and social profile they have, how many people were involved in the conversation, where it took place, etc. We are therefore able to say something is in common usage as we see it represented across a range of texts and users in the corpus. Fox, as cited in Tomlinson (1998: 42), states that:

> By studying concordance lines students will become more aware of language, and will note how particular words are used by native speakers. Whilst there is no automatic transfer from awareness of a feature to the ability to use that feature, there is certainly a likelihood that increased awareness will

lead to increased proficiency – particularly of features which, once pointed out, are encountered frequently in real life language situations.

A corpus also enables us to indicate which patterns are "preferred". Speakers and writers make choices and some choices are more typical in some contexts than in others. The fact that the speaker may choose the form which is the most typical does not mean that the alternative forms are incorrect or non-standard. This process of language analysis will inevitably lead to particular aspects of the language becoming salient, which is the first aim of any kind of consciousness-raising activity. In this regard, Ellis (1991: 241) argues that "consciousness-raising constitutes an approach to grammar teaching which is compatible with current thinking about how learners acquire L2 grammar".

Rather than rely on a diet of "practice activities" which restrict input and expect immediate accuracy in the "production" of small items of language, we should give learners plenty of opportunities to discover language and systematise it for themselves before expecting them to proceduralise their knowledge and put it to use. Performing different kinds of analysis activities based on concordance lines for the most frequent structural patterns can array for language patterns and help students to recognise and memorise useful chunks, as well as to analyse and make use of generalisations about grammar.

Higgins (1991:3) states that:

What is [...] becoming clear is that the most valuable contribution a computer can make to language learning is in supplying, on demand and in an organised fashion, masses and masses of authentic language [...]. The most powerful of these tools is a concordancer.

Stevens (1993:11) claims that:

[...] with concordance software and a corpus of natural English, language learners can short-cut the process of acquiring competence in the target language because the computer is able to help students organise huge amounts of language data so that patterns are more easily discerned.

No doubt, corpus linguistics can provide relevant information about the frequency and distribution with which different grammatical features occur in language use, as well as information about the different semantic and grammatical functions of different words and/or terms. In order to do this, it is necessary to give a series of examples illustrating those advantages in the area of English Grammar and design exercises/or activities, with

the purpose of showing how a linguistic corpus can provide extremely interesting information regarding the behaviour of certain grammatical phenomena studied in the subject under analysis.

Hence, we need to offer our students a manageable corpus of the language to study. That corpus – a "pedagogic corpus" will consist in a set of texts, written and/or spoken as appropriate, which students will process receptively through a series of activities. If we can achieve the aim of providing a suitably representative pedagogic corpus, we can then design a series of language analysis exercises based on that corpus, exercises which enable students to discover typical syntactic patterns of the language for themselves.

Problem detected:

Although the syllabus claims to be learner-centred and supportive of learner initiative, classroom practice appears to subvert this goal. According to the students´ and teachers´ perceptions on this issue, the integration of startegies into the regular course work seems not to be on the pedagogical agenda of the course, and practice is therefore often unfocused and not directed at those skills the students need to improve.

Solution proposal:

Training students in the use of language learning strategies as the study course develops, which will imply providing students with ample, explicit instructional support and equipping them with a menu from which they are able to select strategies they find to be appropriate for specific types of practice activities and tasks.

Autonomy in language learning is a desirable goal for philosophical, pedagogical and practical reasons. According to Boud (1998: 23), "the main characteristic of autonomy as an approach to learning is that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding instruction".

Learner autonomy is evident when the learner takes responsibility for his learning. Many theorists in the area of foreign language learning have discussed learner autonomy (Dickinson, 1987; Allwright, 1990; Holec, 1995; Littlewood, 1996, among others). These theorists define learner autonomy in slightly different ways. Dickinson (1987) defines autonomy as a *situation* in which the learner takes over his own language learning. Holec (1981) defines it as a learner´s *ability* to be respondible for one´s learning, while

Littlewood (1996) argues that autonomy is not just *ability* but also *willingness* to take responsibility. Allwright (1990) emphasizes that autonomy involves not only ability and willingness but also *action* in the direction of responsibility for learning.

Learning startegies have also been defined as "specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques – such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult task- used by students to enhance their own learning (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992: 63). Following this train of thought, Wenden & Rubin (1987: 19) define learning strategies as "[…] any set of operations, steps, routines, used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, and wage of information".

Building on these definitions, we will adhere to the following comprehensive definition of learner autonomy given by Oxford (1999: 110):

> Learner autonomy is the (a) ability and willingness to perform a language task without assistance, with adapatability related to the situational demands, with transferability to other relevant contexts, and with reflection, accompanied by (b) relevant action (the use, usually conscious and intentional, of appropriate learning startegies) reflecting both ability and willingness.

Learners who are autonomous might take responsibility by setting their own goals, planning practice opportunities, or assessing their progress. The philosophical rationale behind autonomy is the belief that learners have the right to make choices with regard to their learning. Liitlejohn (1985) claims that one outcome of learners acting more autonomously may result in an increase in enthusiasm for learning.

It is a widely held belief that learners who are involved in making choices and decisions about aspects of the programme are also likely to feel more secure in their learning (Joiner, cited in McCafferty, 1981). Promoting learner autonomy can also be justified on pedagogical grounds, since, according to Candy (1988: 75), "adults demonstrably learn more, and more effectively, when they are consulted about dimensions such as the pace, sequence, mode of instruction and even the content of what they are studying".

Students seem not to have perceived the link between classroom tasks and the language skills they wish to develop. This observation highlights the need to embody the goal of learner autonomy concerning the materials and the tasks. In order to foster learners´ autonomy, it is absolutely necessary to teach and to implement a number of learning

strategies. Strategies are "the mental and communicative procedures learners use in order to learn and use language" (Nunan, 1999: 171).

Knowledge of strategies is important because the greater awareness a student has of what he is doing, if he is conscious of the process underlying the learning that he is involved in, the more effective learning will be. Furthermore, language learning strategies give language teachers clues about how their students assess, plan and select appropriate skills so as to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the classroom.

Simply using ample accounts of language and conveying information and skills are insufficient methods to support learning. Instead, teachers should be aware of their students´ approaches to learning and expand the students´ repertoires of strategic approaches by involving them as collaborators in developing the knowledge and processes needed to attain common goals. Students who are mentally active and who analyse and reflect on their learning activities will learn, retain, and be able to use information more effectively. Thus, students should take command over their own learning activities and initiate strategic applications that will lead towards more automous learning. Chamot & O´Malley (1994: 18) state that "when students take control over their own learning, they see themselves as more effective and thereby gain in confidence with future learning activities".

In this respect, Chastain (1988: 165) concludes that:

All students have learning startegies; some are successful and some are not. […] Teachers have two equally important obligations in class. One is to teach students how to learn, that is, teaching learning strategies that will enhance learning in the subject for someone with their particular learning style. In general, teachers are much more attentive to the product of learning than to the process of learning.

Chastain´s viewpoint is adhered to by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996: 39), which state that "learning strategies are an integral part of language programs, providing students with the tools for a lifetime of learning".

A number of arguments have been advanced about the contribution of reflective processes to the autonomy of individuals as language learners and language users. Lamy & Goodfellow (1999: 458) claim that "by reflection, we mean having a critical, internal conversation about our own understanding of linguistic structures and the process of our own language learning".

Research (Gebhardt, 2007; Koch, 2008; Hurd & Levis, 2008; Pezeshkian & Kafipour, 2011; Oxford, 2011) has shown that learners who are taught language strategies underlying their learning are more highly motivated than those who are not. Research has also shown that not all learners automatically know which strategies work best for them. For this reason, explicit strategy training, coupled with thinking about how one goes about learning, and experimenting with different strategies, can lead to more effective learning.

Hence, teachers should model startegies, refer to them by name, explain why they are important, suggest when to use a specific one, and elicit from students how they are already using a strategy. As a result of this explicit presentation of learning strategies, students will acquire the metacognitive knowledge they need to use strategies independently and begin to have more control over their own learning process. In this respect, Chamot et al (1999: 99) claim that "explicit instruction places students´ thinking in the spotlight and encourages effective strategies use while students work on classroom tasks".

Oxford (1990; 2011), argues that strategies are important for two reasons. In the first place, strategies are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Secondly, learners who have developed appropriate learning strategies have greater self-confidence and learn more effectively. Along similar lines, Little (1999) suggests that features of autonomy include being able to perform a given task independently, with situational flexibility, in contexts beyond the immediate one, and (in formal learning environments) with conscious intention and reflection.

As we have already pointed out, learning strategies play a key role in learner autonomy. Several scholars (Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Cohen, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996, 2011; Nunan, 1991, 1999; Gebhardt, 2007; Koch, 2008; Hurd & Levis, 2008; Pezeshkian & Kafipour, 2011), have identified numerous links between the use of language learning strategies and proficiency in the targeted language. Hence, to increase language proficiency, teachers should provide explicit instruction that helps students learn how to use more relevant and more powerful language learning strategies. The term *strategy* implies conscious movement towards a goal. The penultimate goal of language learning strategies is to enable the learner to accomplish individual learning tasks (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), and the ultimate goal is to promote language proficiency (Tudor, 1996) so that the learner can use the language outside the classroom.

When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit his learning style and the L2 task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious and purposeful self-regulation of learning. However, students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning startegies to make learning quicker and more effective (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). Consequently, skilled teachers should help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate tools that enable them to become better language learners.

Consequently, we believe that it is essential that we start teaching learning strategies in an explicit fashion in our regular course work. Students should practise strategies while working on authentic, meaningful grammar tasks that are part of the class. Such tasks should be challenging enough, since students are not likely to apply strategies unless they personally experience success with and perceive the benefit of strategies for making a task easier and learning more efficient. In order to carry out this task and fulfill our objective, we should:

- provide students with supporting information about strategies;
- emply various tecniques to encourage students to use strategies;
- give students some guidance for applying strategies whenever engaged in a grammar practice activity;
- scaffold strategies instruction so that students will be able to apply strategies with increasing independence;
- show the students how to identify the learning strategies they have used for a recently completed learning task;
- encourage learners to reflect on their own learning process. Such reports may prove useful, as they will provide both teachers and students with useful insights into the language learning process;
- assess how effectively students are applying the strategies taught so that we can adapt the instruction to the students´ needs;
- include learning strategies evaluations in the assessment portfolio;
- evaluate our own learning strategies instruction so that we can build on the strengths and find ways to improve any area of the instruction that is not meeting the students´ needs;
- to show students how to transfer some particular learning strategies to new tasks;
- provide explicit guidelines for applying learning strategies to learning outside of the classroom.

To sum up, learning strategies instruction and use can turn into an efficient means to help students become better language learners and to help them develop control over and responsibility for their own learning. In other words, learning strategies use may help students become self-regulated language learners and thus it is high time we started training students in the use of language learning strategies as the study course develops, providing students with ample, explicit instructional support and equipping them with a menu from which they are able to select strategies they find to be appropriate for specific types of practice activities and tasks.

Problem detected:

On the one hand, students seem not to transfer what they have learnt in the subject *English Grammar I* to solve new linguistic problems in other subjects. On the other hand, teachers seem not to support the students´ abilities to transfer what they have learnt in the subject as to help them actively put knowledge into practice in new and challenging linguistic situations.

Solution proposal:

It is necessary to create a new learning environment where students are trained to transfer what they have learnt into new learning situations. Students need to be taught how to transfer their knowledge – that is, they need to understand how a particular disciplinary content may be relevant to a wide variety of linguistic situations and/or skills developed in other subjects.

A belief in transfer lies at the heart of our educational system. Most educators want learning activities to have positive and lasting effects that extend beyond the exact conditions of initial learning.

No doubt, language learning, besides other things, does involve playing attention to, and eventually mastering, the formal features of the second language. Grammar teaching, positively looked at, helps learners to become skilled in recognizing, analysing, and eventually mastering these structural features, which are an essential aspect of proficiency. Likewise, it is of paramount importance to put whatever grammatical feature is being taught into a meaningful context of practical use so that the meaning is never in doubt.

In some sense, one of the main objectives of the course of study under focus is to help students transfer the linguistic contents they learn into other learning situations or course of studies; however, this goal does not seem to be fulfilled. When asked about whether they were able to transfer what they studied in *English Grammar I* during the academic yar into other learning situations, very few students claim to have done so.

On the other hand, teachers complained that it is common practice that students may fill in the blanks using different tenses, but they are not able to use them correctly when engaged in conversation or in a writing task, that is, they do not or cannot transfer the knowledge on tenses they have acquired in this subject into different learning situations in *English Language II*.

Even if the student´s performance in a grammar test is fairly good, there is no guarantee that he would be able to speak and write in English well. In this respect, Gokhale (2010) suggests that in most cases, grammar is taught as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. Ideally, the teaching of grammar should help our students to produce utterances that exemplify the grammatical rules, but it seems that we generally focus on teaching the rules of grammar and ignore the communicative aspect of the language.

For transfer to occur, learning must involve more than simple memorization the application of a fixed set of procedures (Bransford et al, 2000: 55). Learners must understand a concept or have command of a skill in order to be able to use it themselves. They must know *how* to apply what they have learnt to new situations, and they must know *when* it applies.

An obvious danger of dealing with syntactic structures in isolation and focusing on them one by one is "fragmentation". While paying attention to each structure, the students have difficulty in storing the information and making use of it in an integrated fashion because they lack a frame of reference. Typically, such grammatical items or rules are learnt one after another in an analytic manner, whereas items learnt earlier are not incorporated and are quickly forgotten. Therefore, learners need some sort of reference system which can provide them with a linguistic context into which they can fit new information. Thus, it would be worth including activities that involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form.

To teach for transfer, teachers must ask, "What is it about what I am teaching now that will be of value, of use, and a source of understanding for my students at some point in

the future, when they are in a situation that is not identical to the one they are in now?". It is fundamental that teachers should not simply ask, "Where are my students in the curriculum now?", but also "Where might this learning be going?"

Processes of learning and the transfer of learning are central to understand how people develop inportant competencies. All new learning involves transfer based on previous learning, and this fact has important implications for the design of instruction that helps students learn.

Teachers should be aware of the fact that the mere exposure or memorization does not imply learning; there must be understanding. Teaching that emphasizes how to use knowledge or that improves motivation enhances transfer. In this respect, learning should be considered an active and dynamic process, not a static product.

Practices to improve transfer include having students specify connections across multiple contexts or having them develop general solutions and strategies that would apply beyond a single-context case. New learning builds on previous learning, which implies that teachers can facilitate transfer by activating what students know and by making their thinking visible.

An important point about transfer is that the initial knowledge that is intended for transfer needs to be well-grounded. One factor that influences initial learning is whether students have learnt a particular content so that they understand it or whether they have simply memorized facts or procedures. Learning with understanding includes grappling with principles and ideas. The deeper the understanding of the original content the students possess, the better equipped they will be to transfer this initial knowledge to a new situation and grapple with this more complex problem.

Transfer from one subject area to another takes a major investment of time. Students need time to understand the meaning of new ideas, to draw connections to other ideas, to apply what they have learnt to other tasks, to determine patterns of relationships, and to practise new skills. Bransford et al (2000: 58) observe:

> Attempts to cover too many topics too quicky may hinder learning and subsequent transfer because students (a) learn only isolated sets of facts that are not organized and connected or (b) are introduced to organizing principles that they cannot grasp because they lack enough specific knowledge to make them meaningful.

This same principle causes many educators and learning theorists to argue for a "less is more" curriculum that carefully selects important concepts for students to explore

deeply, rather than a "coverage" curriculum that superficially mentions lots of ideas that are never really applied or understood (Bruner, 1960; Gardner, 1999; Bransford et al, 2000).

The way in which teachers organise ideas and learning experiences is another factor that makes a difference in how deeply students understand. Understanding requires drawing connections and seeing how new ideas are related to those already learnt, that is, how they are alike and different.

Structuring the learning environment in strategic ways can also foster understanding. For instance, experiential learning can be made even more powerful when coupled with a structured examination of the central ideas to be learnt. Creating a simulation or an inquiry experience in which students explore materials or data and then following it with a structured explanation of those ideas through a lecture or guided discussion can produce stronger learning than either experience or explanantion alone.

A further key issue concerning transfer is motivation. Motivation affects the amount of time students are willing to put into learning. Motivation can be seen as a function of how learners see themselves, how they see the task at hand, whether they think they can succeed, and whether teachers help them engage with the material in productive ways (Blumenfeld & Mergendoller, 1992).

Motivation is enhanced when learners see themselves as capable. Motivation is also enhanced when the students value a task and find it interesting - something teachers can support by relating the materials and the contents to what they have learnt in other subjects.

As grammar teachers, we need to ask ourselves, "What are the simpler skills that, again and again, turn out to be useful in more complex performances we want students to learn?" We should make sure that students learn those simpler skills well so that when they confront the more complex performances, they can put into practice what they already know.

Metacognition is also important to transfer because it involves being wise enough to know that we already know something and will use it when it is necessary. Students transfer knowledge into a new learning situation, just as they transfer out newly formed understandings to other settings.

As grammar teachers, we can build on the knowledge students bring to the classroom by providing opportunities to discuss what they already know about a topic, relating linguistic problems to familiar contexts, and working with other teachers to build curricula that build across other subjects.

Learning discrete, unconnected facts outside of a broader context reduces the likelihood that studenst will be able to remember and apply their knowledge later. Learning information that is never applied or put into practice also reduces the likelihood of later transfer.

The clearer we make the fundamental structure of the topic being developed and where that content stands in relation to many others, and the clearer we make the general principles that apply to what is being studied, the more likely students will be able to understand the contents and use them later.

Summing up, engaging students in metacognitive activities - helping them to become more aware of how to focus on certain problems, to generate procedures, and to evaluate their own progress - can improve transfer and reduce the need for explicit prompting. Research in the field of EFL learning has demonstrated how teaching self-monitoring strategies can positively influence their ability to transfer to new situations.

Problem detected:

The students feel that many of them fail or pass an exam depending on who marks his test; in other words, their passing or failing an exam depends on the luck of the draw, which turns the assessment procedure implemented in the course biased and unfair.

Solution proposal:

It is critical that the scoring procedures are designed to assure that performance ratings reflect the students´ true capabilities and are not a function of the perceptions and biases of the teachers evaluating the performance. Thus, the Chair´s staff should work towards an objective scoring system by refining the assessment tools and criteria.

The act of evaluating is of vital importance because it represents the encounter between the criteria established by the educational institution and the teacher, and what the student has learnt during the process of instruction. As a result of evaluation, the student either moves onto the next stage in the process of learning or is prevented from continuing and then has to come back to the previous stage to revise and practise more.

It is clear that, at least in part, being able to do a degree programme at a brisk pace or at a slower one depends on the judgement the teacher makes, according to certain criteria,

about what the students show in the testing situation. The decisive role that evaluation plays in relation to students' academic programme justifies a detailed analysis.

Fairness of language tests and testing practices have always been a concern among teachers in the Chair of *English Grammar I*. However, when analysing the data collected in the questionnaire-surveys, it was found that a great number of students complained about lack of uniformity concerning the criteria used by the teaching staff when correcting their exams. In other words, students felt that, when compared to their partners´, their grades or scores varied significantly depending on the teacher who had marked their tests.

In general terms, the reliability of any test is the degree to which the scores are consistent. As White (1985: 177) puts it, "the reliability of a measure is an indication of its consistencies, or its simple fairness". As stated above, assessment may affect decisions about grades, advancement, placement, instructional needs, and curriculum. Thus, we cannot ignore the fact that in our academic context, where we usually implement a summative evaluation, the score a student gets on a test is the piece of information that tells us what the learner knows and is able to do in the specific subject area he has been tested. It is crucial, then, that tests scores be adequately reliable in representing the students´ knowledge and skills.

The aim in maximizing objectivity is to give each student an equal chance to do well. Consequently, teachers should do everything in their power to find test questions, administartion procedures, scoring methods and reporting policies that optimize the chances that each student will receive equal and fair treatment. According to Brown (1996: 31), fairness can be defined as "the degree to which a test treats every student the same or the degree to which it is impartial".

Language assessment is clearly an integral part of language teaching and learning, as it provides an empircal basis for making a variety of educational decisions, both on practical and theoretical levels. Therefore, it is crucial that the assessments we use to measure grammatical ability reflect the best practices available in the field; otherwise, the inferences we make from assessment scores may be neither meaningful nor appropriate, and potentially unfair.

A major problem concerning assessment is how to achieve an overall reliable score based on the judgements of specific criteria. Rater reliability has to do with the consistency between raters´ judgements on one test method. Gamaroff (2000: 44) claims that:

A test is said to be used for a valid purpose when the tester knows *what* is being tested. However, if testers cannot agree on what that *what* is, i.e. if there is no interrater reliability, there can be no validity. So validity and reliablility are two sides of the same corner".

Interrater reliability consists of two major kinds of judgements: (1) the order of priority for individual raters of performance criteria, and (2) the agreement between raters on the ratings that should be awarded on what importance to attach to different criteria.

Therefore, rater reliability is concerned with reconciling authentic subjectivity and objective precision. In this regard, Alderson, Clapham & Wall (1995: 105-106) state that the training of examiners, that is, all those teachers who are responsible for judging a student´s performance in a text or examination, is a crucial component of any testing programme, since if the marking of a test is not valid and reliable, then all of the other work undertaken earlier to construct a "quality" instrument will have been a waste of time. No matter how well a test´s specifications reflect the objectives stated in the syllabus or how much care has been taken in the design of items, all the effort will have been in vain if the students cannot have faith in the marks they are given by the examiners.

Measurement, according to Mathews (1985: 90), "implies a standardised instrument of assessment and an operative who can consistently apply it". Mathews goes on to state that there at least three sources which may threaten the soundness of a test:

1. uncertainty about the nature of the attributes of students which are to examined and the units of measurement which can be attached to them;

2. uncertainty about the degree to which the questions and answers actually relate to those attributes even if their nature is identified;

3. inexactness in mark schemes, and variety of interpretation and application of the mark schemes by the markers.

No doubt, bias is an issue of concern with the grading of examinations. Hence, teachers should work hard towards the reliability of the scoring. It is essential then that a student´s score on a test does not depend upon who marked the test, nor upon the consistency of an individual marker.

In order to solve this problem, it is essential that we assume that there are different teaching styles and different rating styles. Good scoring criteria clarify instructional goals for both teachers and students; enhance fairness by informing students of exactly how they will be assessed, and help teachers to be accurate and unbiassed in scoring. However, examiners not only have to become familiar with the marking systems (schemes or scales)

that they are expected to use and how to apply them consistently; they also need to know what to do in unanticipated circustances or with answers or errors which they have not been trained to expect.

Test takers should bear in mind that realiability is not just a coefficient; it serves as the basis for sound decision-making practices and is a precondition for test validity. Indeed, reliability functions as a fundamental building block in any test construction, use, and interpretation. In this regard, training should give the examiners competence and confidence; however, we should be aware that training cannot on its own guarantee that all examiners will mark as they are supposed to. There are many factors which can interfere with an examiner´s ability to give sound and consistent judgements. Thus, it is the Head of the Chair´s responsibility to design quality control procedures to assure the students that the marks they get are as reliable as possible.

For all the reasons stated above, it is absolutely necessary that the Chair generate working solutions to the problem in order to diminish any differences in training, experience and frame of reference between the raters in order to guarantee internal consistency and fairness.

CHAPTER 7

DIDACTIC-PEDAGOGIC RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY, SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND FINAL CONDIDERATIONS

Slowly, the profession as a whole is realising that, no matter how much intellectual energy is put into the invention of new methods or of new approaches, what really matters is what happens when teachers and learners get together in the classroom. This shift in emphasis from concentrating on planning decisions to concentrating on looking at what actually happens in the classroom, has led researchers to have much greater respect for classroom teaching. The more we look, the more we find, and the more we realise how complex the teacher´s job is. And teachers, in their turn, faced at last with researchers who have at least some idea of the enormous complexity of everyday classroom life, are beginning to be more receptive to the whole research enterprise. Being a good classroom teacher means being alive to what goes on in the classroom, alive to the problems of sorting out what matters, moment by moment, from what does not. And that is what classroom research is all about: gaining a better understanding of what good teachers (and learners) do instinctively as a matter of course, so that ultimately all can benefit.

(Allwright & Bailey, 1991)

In Chapter 6, we presented the outcomes of this investigation together with a discussion of the results obtained. This Chapter concludes the research with the presentation of the pedagogical implications that derive from this study, some avenues for further research, and final considerations.

7.1. Didactic-pedagogic Relevance of this Study

Education is an intentional and purposed-aimed and, therefore, whether and up to what degree the aims are achieved is something entailed in the action itself. Consequently, the permanent evaluation of processes and products must constitute a natural and mandatory task of all higher education institutions.

However, the possibility of actually assessing the quality of services and university production is a very complex problem that today seems to tumble between two risks: on the one hand, it is the latest fashion, which may lead quality and education, essential features for the life of any university, to be considered as a rhetorical and temporary method, subjected to an analysis that does not go deep into the roots and, most importantly, without being translated into actual actions aimed at having continuity and permanence. On the other hand, education evaluation generates changes when there are specific problems and consensus on the need to promote and implement innovations in order to improve the diagnosed situations. As Holt (1991: 5) states:

> Evaluation in education cannot be value free. An evaluation, like a researcher, has to choose, to choose which data, which interviews; which interpretation. Evaluation is therefore a political activity, since political questions arise when people disagree and a choice has to be made.

Consequently, we expect that the results of this project will have a relevant effect to improve the teaching and learning processes in the Chair of *English Grammar I* in the Faculty of Languages of the National University of Córdoba. A study like this one can provide a clarifying view of description categories and interpretation for future evaluations that lead to take up a culture of permanent self-evaluation.

Similarly, the internal concern for improvement of the institution ensures functioning control, willingness to criticize itself and a reduced information scheme and permanent formative control. In terms of the didactic-pedagogical consequences expected after this project, we can mention: (i) changes in the teaching methodologies; (ii) changes in the syllabus of the subject under study in this project, (iii) implementation of an instruction system in learning strategies that help reduce the opt-out indexes; (iv) changes in the current Plan of Studies and a better horizontal and vertical articulation of common and core subjects of the different courses; and (v) the implementation of similar studies in other Chairs.

7.2. Suggestions for Future Research

The present analysis has shown that it is possible to carry out quality control; the process and results of this study can inform further educational research. Future investigations may include the implementation of similar studies in other Chairs and different types of evaluation activities to address specific issues such as alignment with pedagogical techniques and benchmark achievement, which will provide valuable information for continuous improvement.

Another proposal that might merit further research is a study in order to identify the range of strategies employed by the learners when studying grammar; to determine whether such strategies can be organized into a taxonomy; to study whether the teaching strategies explicitly taught are consistent with the learning strategies used by the students. Finally, an important task for future research will be to carry out an investigation that traces the root causes of dropouts in the Chair of *English Grammar I*.

7.3. Final Considerations

There is no doubt that making education universal is no longer the only important challenge; it is for this reason that it is necessary that society commits itself to having an education based on quality standards, according to the new needs, that is social and culturally meaningful. Only by means of a good quality education, will we be able to minimize the effects that lead to social exclusion and facilitate equity among individuals and social cohesion within societies. It is on this scenario where the rediscovery of evaluation takes place as one of the main means to efficiently and rationally manage education quality.

The university education system requires more and better education and teaching levels and this is what education assessment should contribute with. Achieving academic excellence is our main mission. For this purpose, it is necessary that teachers receive training, implement new ways of action and modify our attitude and mentality regarding evaluation, which is our responsibility as teachers of an education system. This expects a more and more systematic and scientific approach by all the participants involved: teachers, students, methodology, context, assessment, etc.

Therefore, it is essential that quality criteria guide change based on evaluation practice just as it is experienced by the protagonists of education: those who teach and

those who learn. To fulfil this objective, the content of quality shall become a quality "standard" or "criteria" shared by all the actors of the education situation. It shall be necessary that quality criteria, without limitation, be implemented as value judgements by each actor of the system, which entails the capacity to share aims as a common effort and to contribute to this construction from their own capacity to formulate and realise proposals. Only by this means will we move forward in building shared criteria in order to improve the academic quality of this process.

Evaluating the academic quality of the teaching and learning processes implemented in our classroom, and better trying to involve more teachers when doing it, might be time consuming; however, in the long run, it might be rewarding knowing that we are catering for what our students really need and want.

Opening the classroom for our peers and students as well as enabling the analysis and discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning systems will allow us to create a culture to share our experiences, learn from our rights and wrongs, and overcome the deficiencies detected; it will also make it possible that, as teachers, we learn from our colleagues, plan our classes together and help each other to improve. In other words, it will allow us to examine our own teaching practices in a continuous manner which, in turn, will generate better education quality.

A quality evaluation system that starts by recognizing the needs of this corporate work and which, at the same time, can estimate the actual potential to make contributions in this regard is born with great possibilities to overcome the reduced "control" role that is usually assigned to evaluation actions. Hence, we hope that this study will constitute a tool that contributes to supporting decision making, programme improvement, accountability and quality control. In this regard, Alderson & Beretta (1992: 298) claim that:

> Evaluations […] are intended to serve practical ends, to inform decision makers as to appropriate courses of action, and, above all, to be sueful and to be sued. An evaluation that is not used is in some important sense a failure. It may have employed an elaborate design, the data collection instruments may have been well designed and appropriate to needs, there may have been appropriate planning of timescales and resources, and so on. Yet if the results and recommendations are ignored, the efforts that have gone into the evaluation are wasted.

We hope that this investigation will help build awareness of teaching through self-initiated means and help teachers to become aware of their own teaching beliefs, attitudes and

practices. We also hope this study contributes to building the *culture of evaluation* and institutionalising the *culture of quality assurance*. As Scrivener (2011: 386) claims:

> *We can teach and teach. Or we can teach and learn. This kind of teaching, a "learning teaching", is a refusal to say "I know it all. I can relax for the rest of my career." Learning teaching is a desire to move forward, to keep learning from what happens. It involves feedback from others and from ourselves about what happened. It involves reflection on what happened, together with an excitement about trying a slightly different option next time. […] Learning teaching is a belief that creativity, understanding, experience and character continue growing throughout one´s life.*

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA
FACULTAD DE LENGUAS
Maestría en Inglés con orientación en Lingüística Aplicada

Evaluación de la calidad de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje en la cátedra Gramática Inglesa I en la Facultad de Lenguas de la UNC

A través de esta encuesta se pretende recoger información confiable para medir, favorecer y mejorar la calidad académica de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje durante el *ciclo lectivo 2010* en la Cátedra *Gramática Inglesa I* de las carreras de Profesorado, Traductorado y Licenciatura en Inglés.
Por favor, responda en forma anónima, completa, con libertad, responsabilidad y la mayor objetividad posible.

1. Complete con sus datos personales o marque con una X la(s) opción(es) correcta(s), según corresponda:

1.1. Fecha de realización de esta encuesta (día, mes y año):

1.2. Edad:
Entre 18 y 20 años: ☐   Entre 21 y 24 años ☐   Más de 25 años ☐

1.3. Sexo: Masculino ☐   Femenino ☐

1.4. Carrera(s) que cursa: Profesorado ☐   Traductorado ☐   Licenciatura ☐

1.5. Año de inscripción en la carrera de:

Profesorado ☐   Traductorado ☐   Licenciatura ☐

1.6. ¿Cursó esta materia por primera vez durante el ciclo lectivo 2010?   SÍ ☐   NO ☐

1.7 ¿Rindió los dos parciales de esta asignatura?   SÍ ☐   NO ☐

1.8. Cantidad de horas semanales que Ud. dedica al estudio de la asignatura sin contar el tiempo de asistencia a clases:

Hasta 4 horas semanales ☐

De 5 a 8 horas semanales ☐

Más de 8 horas semanales ☐

1.9. Según su experiencia en el cursado de esta asignatura, la carga horaria destinada al desarrollo de los distintos contenidos disciplinares de esta asignatura es:

Escasa ☐

Suficiente ☐

Excesiva ☐

1.10. Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue "Es escasa", ¿Cómo cree Ud. que se podría resolver esta dificultad? (Puede marcar más de una opción)

Incluyendo menos contenidos teórico-prácticos en el programa ☐

Agregando horas de clase ☐

Diseñando material de apoyo para estudiar en casa ☐

Sintetizando en clase los aspectos teórico-prácticos más importantes ☐

Utilizando las nuevas tecnologías (e-mail, foros, blogs, etc) para brindar más práctica ☐

1.11. ¿Cuál fue su porcentaje de asistencia a las clases dictadas durante el presente ciclo lectivo?

0 al 25% ☐

26 al 50% ☐

51 al 75% ☐

76 al 90 % ☐

91 al 100% ☐

1.12. Los contenidos teórico-prácticos desarrollados en esta asignatura fueron, en general, para Ud.:

Totalmente conocidos ☐

Muchos de ellos conocidos ☐

Algunos conocidos ☐

Totalmente desconocidos ☐

1.13. Si en algún momento Ud. tuvo problemas en los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje de algunos de los contenidos teórico-prácticos de esta asignatura desarrollados durante el ciclo lectivo, ¿a quién recurrió para resolverlos? (Puede marcar más de una opción)

A su(s) docente(s) ☐

A sus compañeros de curso ☐

A otros compañeros que ya cursaron la asignatura ☐

A un profesor particular ☐

A algún familiar o amigo ☐

A nadie ☐

2**. Por favor, responda SÍ o NO a cada una de las siguientes afirmaciones:**

A. Al inicio del Ciclo Lectivo:

1. Se me comunicó el cronograma de actividades (contenidos a cubrir durante el primer y segundo cuatrimestre, fechas de evaluaciones, etc.) dispuesto para todo el ciclo lectivo. ....

2. Se explicitaron los objetivos de la asignatura. ....

3. Se explicitaron los contenidos teórico-prácticos mínimos a desarrollar durante el ciclo lectivo. ....

4. Se explicitó la metodología de evaluación que se implementaría durante el Ciclo lectivo. ....

5. Se explicitaron los criterios de evaluación establecidos en el Programa vigente de la asignatura. ....

6. Se hizo referencia a la bibliografía mínima requerida para el desarrollo teórico-práctico de los distintos contenidos disciplinares. ....

7. Se hizo referencia a distintas estrategias de aprendizaje para favorecer mi propia construcción de conocimientos. ....

8. Se hizo referencia a distintas estrategias de aprendizaje para favorecer el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa oral y escrita. ....

9. Se explicitó el rol que cumpliría cada uno de los docentes integrantes a cargo del dictado de la asignatura (Profesor Titular o Adjunto; Profesor Asistente; Profesor(es) Adscriptos). ....

B. Durante el Ciclo lectivo:

1. Fui orientado acerca de los distintos contenidos teórico-prácticos que se incluirían en las evaluaciones (Exámenes Parciales, Trabajos Prácticos, Examen Final, etc.) ....

2. Fui orientado acerca de los distintos tipos de ejercicios que se incluirían en las evaluaciones (Exámenes Parciales y Examen Final) ....

3. Fui orientado explícitamente acerca de las distintas estrategias de aprendizaje que podría utilizar para favorecer mi propia construcción de conocimientos. ....

4. Fui entrenado explícitamente acerca de las distintas estrategias de aprendizaje que podría utilizar para favorecer el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa oral y escrita. ....

5. Utilicé distintas estrategias de aprendizaje para lograr una mayor efectividad en la adquisición de la lengua oral. ....

6. Utilicé distintas estrategias de aprendizaje para lograr una mayor efectividad en la adquisición de la lengua escrita. ....

7. Se respetó el cronograma de trabajo comunicado al inicio del ciclo lectivo. (Responda sólo si su respuesta en el punto 2.A.1. fue afirmativa. ....

8. Se utilizó la bibliografía requerida al comienzo del ciclo lectivo para desarrollar los contenidos teórico-prácticos de la asignatura. ....

9. Se desarrollaron todos los contenidos del programa explicitados al comienzo del ciclo lectivo. (Responda sólo si su respuesta en el punto 2.A.3. fue afirmativa). ....

10. Se corrigieron en clase la mayor parte de las actividades prácticas asignadas. ....

11. Se respetó la metodología de evaluación explicitada al comienzo del ciclo lectivo. (Responda sólo si su respuesta en el punto 2.A.4. fue afirmativa). ....

12. Se respetó el rol asignado a cada uno de los miembros del equipo docente que se encuentra a cargo del dictado de la asignatura. ....

3. Por favor, evalúe, según la escala de calificaciones de 1 (nivel más bajo) a 5 (nivel más alto) los siguientes aspectos de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje implementados durante el presente ciclo lectivo:

1. Clima de trabajo en el aula: ....

2. Calidad del material de estudio empleado para el dictado de la asignatura: ....

3. Nivel de compromiso de los docentes en los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje. ....

4. Claridad de los docentes para explicar temas y conceptos. ....

5. Grado de conocimiento de los contenidos disciplinares de la asignatura demostrado por los docentes a cargo del dictado de la asignatura. ....

6. Relación entre el tiempo destinado al desarrollo teórico de los temas y el tiempo dedicado a la implementación de actividades prácticas sobre dichos contenidos teóricos. ....

7. Grado de complejidad de los contenidos teórico-prácticos desarrollados durante el ciclo lectivo. ....

8. Grado de correspondencia entre el tipo de actividades prácticas incluidas en el material de estudio y realizadas o corregidas en clase y el tipo de ejercicios incluidos en las evaluaciones. ....

9. Grado de complejidad de las evaluaciones. ....

10. Metodología de enseñanza utilizada por los docentes para el desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos. ....

11. Grado de su propia participación en clase durante el desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos. ....

12. Grado de su propia participación en clase durante la corrección de las actividades prácticas. ....

13. Su propio nivel de conocimientos adquiridos en esta asignatura. ....

4. Por favor, coloque una X en el casillero correspondiente a cada uno de los enunciados que se señalan a continuación:

Los docentes a cargo del desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos de la asignatura demostraron preocupación por:

	Frecuencia			
	Siempre	*Casi siempre*	*A veces*	*Nunca*
Que los alumnos se interesen por los temas.				
Responder a las preguntas de los alumnos.				
Orientar a los alumnos acerca de bibliografía complementaria para realizar actividades prácticas extra.				
Utilizar distintos medios audio-visuales y/o tecnológicos para desarrollar los contenidos teórico-prácticos.				

Comentar al curso en general los principales errores cometidos en las evaluaciones.				
Brindar explicaciones al curso en general acerca de cómo subsanar los errores cometidos en las evaluaciones.				
Brindar la posibilidad de realizar consultas para evacuar dudas sobre los temas desarrollados fuera del horario de clase y dentro del ámbito de la Facultad.				
Realizar ejercicios de consolidación, especialmente de aquellos temas que ofrecieron mayor dificultad.				
Utilizar material didáctico variado (pizarrón, manual de cátedra, videos, CDs, nuevas tecnologías, etc.) para desarrollar los distintos contenidos teórico-prácticos.				

5. Señale con una X las cinco mayores dificultades que Ud. encontró en esta asignatura para favorecer sus propio procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje:

1. Actitud del docente frente al curso.

2. Conocimientos básicos no adquiridos en la asignatura *Práctica Gramatical del Inglés*.

3. Complejidad de los temas desarrollados durante el ciclo lectivo.

4. Extensión de la bibliografía obligatoria para el desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos.

5. Falta de claridad de los docentes para explicar los contenidos teórico-prácticos.

6. Escasa carga horaria semanal y/o anual para cumplimentar con el desarrollo de los contenidos programáticos que se abordaron durante el ciclo lectivo.

7. Escasa disponibilidad de material bibliográfico en la biblioteca de la Facultad de Lenguas para profundizar aspectos teórico-prácticos de la asignatura y/o realizar práctica complementaria.

8. Imposibilidad de acceso a horas de consulta a cargo de los docentes o integrantes de la Cátedra.

9. Proporción alumno-docente (alto número de alumnos por docente).

10. Metodología de enseñanza implementada por los docentes.

11. Modalidad de evaluación.

12. Falta de congruencia entre los objetivos establecidos en el programa y los que efectivamente se cumplieron. ☐

13. Disparidad manifiesta entre los contenidos programáticos desarrollados en clase y los que efectivamente se evaluaron. ☐

14. Disparidad entre el tipo de ejercitación realizada en clase y el tipo de ejercitación efectivamente incluida en las evaluaciones. ☐

15. Disparidad entre los criterios de evaluación establecidos en el programa vigente y los que efectivamente se aplicaron en las evaluaciones. ☐

6. Por favor, responda las siguientes preguntas en el espacio provisto para tal fin:

1. ¿Con qué dificultades se encontró durante el cursado de la asignatura?

2. ¿Qué contenidos teóricos desarrollados durante el ciclo lectivo le resultaron más interesantes o útiles? ¿Por qué?

3. ¿Qué contenidos teóricos le ofrecieron mayor dificultad? ¿Por qué?

4. ¿Cuál es su opinión respecto del material didáctico utilizado para el desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos en clase? ¿Sugeriría algún cambio? ¿Cuál(es)?

5. En caso de haber utilizado estrategias de aprendizaje para estudiar los distintos contenidos teórico-prácticos de esta asignatura, ¿cuáles utilizó?

6. ¿Pudo relacionar los contenidos desarrollados y aprendidos en *Gramática Inglesa I* y los que Ud. estudió y aprendió en *Práctica Gramatical del Inglés?* En caso de que su respuesta haya sido afirmativa, ¿podría explicar cómo logró realizar dicha relación?. Si Ud. respondió a la pregunta anterior en forma negativa, ¿podría dar las razones por las cuales no logró realizar ninguna conexión entre los contenidos desarrollados en dichas asignaturas?

7. ¿Pudo relacionar los contenidos desarrollados y aprendidos en *Gramática Inglesa I* y los que Ud. estudió y aprendió en *Lengua Inglesa II, Fonética y Fonología Inglesa I, y/o Lengua Castellana II* ? En caso de que su respuesta haya sido afirmativa, ¿podría explicar cómo logró realizar dicha relación?. Si Ud. respondió a la pregunta anterior en forma negativa, ¿podría dar las razones por las cuales no logró realizar ninguna conexión entre los contenidos desarrollados en dichas asignaturas?

8. ¿Qué cambios sugeriría Ud. para mejorar la calidad académica de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje en esta asignatura?

9. ¿Está de acuerdo con la modalidad de evaluación implementada en la Cátedra? ¿Por qué?

10. ¿Cree que su(s) docente(s) hizo / hicieron una devolución efectiva de los resultados obtenidos en las distintas evaluaciones llevadas a cabo durante el ciclo lectivo? ¿Por qué?

11. ¿Contó su comisión con la participación de Ayudantes – Alumnos? Si su respuesta es afirmativa, ¿valora su actuación positivamente?, ¿por qué?

12. ¿Considera Ud. que las calificaciones que obtuvo en los exámenes parciales de esta asignatura se corresponden con el conocimiento que Ud. posee de la misma? ¿Por qué?

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA
FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

Maestría en Inglés con Orientación en Lingüística Aplicada
Maestrando: Prof. Fabián Negrelli

Evaluación de la calidad de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje en la cátedra Gramática Inglesa I en la Facultad de Lenguas de la UNC

Cuestionario-encuesta para los docentes frente a curso en la Cátedra *Gramática Inglesa I* durante el ciclo lectivo 2010

A través de esta encuesta, se pretende recoger información confiable para medir, favorecer y mejorar la calidad académica de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje durante el *ciclo lectivo 2010* en la cátedra *Gramática Inglesa I* de las carreras de Profesorado, Traductorado y Licenciatura en Inglés en la Facultad de Lenguas de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba.

Por favor, responda en forma anónima, completa, con libertad, responsabilidad y la mayor objetividad posible.

SECCIÓN A: Cargos y Formación Académica

1. Por favor, complete con sus datos personales o marque con una X la(s) opción(es) correcta(s), según corresponda:

1.1. Título(s) académico(s) de grado:

1. Profesor/a de Inglés:

2. Traductor/a de Inglés:

3. Licenciado/a de Inglés:

1.2. ¿Considera que su título es afín a la asignatura que Ud. dicta?

1. Sí

2. No

1.3. Título(s) académico(s) de posgrado:

1. Especialista:

2. Magíster:

3. Doctor/a:

1.4. ¿Cursa o ha cursado (otros) estudios de posgrado?

1.Sí

2. No

1.5. Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue afirmativa, ¿cuáles? ....

1.6. ¿Está categorizado como docente investigador?

1.Sí

2.No

1.7. Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue afirmativa, ¿qué categoría posee? ....

1.8. ¿Integra actualmente algún grupo de investigación avalado por SECyT o por algún otro organismo de carácter oficial?

1. Sí

2. No

1.9. ¿Ha integrado anteriormente algún grupo de investigación avalado por SECyT o por algún otro organismo de carácter oficial?

1. Sí

2. No

1.10. ¿Cuál ha sido su cargo en la Cátedra *Gramática Inglesa I* durante el ciclo lectivo 2010?

1. Profesor Titular

2. Profesor Adjunto

3. Profesor Asistente

1.11. ¿Cuál es su antigüedad en el cargo declarado en el ítem anterior? ....

1.12. ¿Ha ocupado otros cargos, *rentados* o *ad honorem*, en esta misma Cátedra? ¿Durante cuánto tiempo?

1. Sí

2. No

1.12. Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue afirmativa, ¿cuáles?, ¿durante cuánto tiempo?

1. Profesor Titular

2. Profesor Adjunto/a

3. Profesor Asistente / Jefe de Trabajos Prácticos

4. Profesor Adscripto/a

5. Ayudante-Alumno/a

1.13. ¿Cuál es su antigüedad como docente en la Cátedra? ....

SECCIÓN B: Evaluación de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje

1. Por favor, marque con una X la(s) opción(es) que crea correcta(s), según corresponda:

1.1. En su opinión, la carga horaria destinada al desarrollo de los distintos contenidos disciplinares de esta asignatura es:

1. Escasa

2. Suficiente

3. Excesiva

1.2. Si su respuesta a la pregunta anterior fue "escasa", ¿cómo cree Ud. que se podría resolver esta dificultad? (Puede marcar más de una opción)

1. Incluyendo menos contenidos teórico-prácticos en el programa

2. Incrementando las horas de clase

3. Diseñando material de apoyo para que los alumnos refuercen los contenidos desarrollados en clase

4. Sintetizando en clase los aspectos teórico-prácticos más importantes

5. Trasladando algunos contenidos a la asignatura *Gramática Inglesa II*, dictada en el tercer año de la carrera

6. Utilizando las tecnologías digitales(uso del aula virtual, email, foros, blogs, etc.) para brindar más práctica

2. Por favor, marque con una X aquellas actividades en las cuales Ud. tuvo participación en el marco de la Cátedra *Gramática Inglesa I* durante el ciclo lectivo 2010:

Cargo(s) que ocupó en la Cátedra durante el ciclo 2010: ....

1. Participó en la conducción y evaluación de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje ☐

2. Desarrolló los contenidos de la asignatura y llevó a cabo las actividades que le fueron

    asignadas, según el cargo que ocupó en la Cátedra ☐

3. Colaboró con la selección, elaboración y sistematización del material didáctico empleado

    para el desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos estipulados en el programa vigente. ☐

4. Participó en las reuniones de Cátedra que se llevaron a cabo durante el año académico ☐

5. Integró las mesas de examen correspondientes a los exámenes finales de la asignatura ☐

6. Tuvo a su cargo Profesores Adscriptos ☐

7. Tuvo a su cargo Ayudantes-Alumnos ☐

8. Dirigió y corrigió Trabajos Finales de Adscripción ☐

9. Cumplimentó con la presentación de los Informes Docentes Anuales solicitados por la

    Secretaría Académica de la Facultad de Lenguas. ☐

10. Formó parte de Tribunales de Concursos de Títulos, Antecedentes y Oposición y de

    Selecciones Docentes, para cubrir cargos docentes en *Gramática Inglesa I* y en otras

    asignaturas. ☐

11. Llevó a cabo la corrección de exámenes parciales ☐

3. Por favor, marque con una X la(s) opción(es) que crea correcta(s), según corresponda:

3.1. Según su experiencia en el dictado de la asignatura, Ud. cree que para los alumnos los contenidos teórico-prácticos desarrollados en esta asignatura fueron

1. totalmente conocidos ☐

2. muchos de ellos conocidos ☐

3. algunos conocidos ☐

4. totalmente desconocidos ☐

4. Por favor, responda SÍ o NO a cada una de las siguientes afirmaciones:

A. Al inicio del Ciclo Lectivo, en su(s) comisión(es):

1. Se comunicó el cronograma de actividades (contenidos disciplinares a desarrollar en el primer y segundo cuatrimestre, fechas de evaluaciones, etc.) dispuesto para todo el ciclo lectivo. ....

2. Se explicitaron los objetivos de la asignatura. ....

3. Se explicitaron los contenidos programáticos mínimos a desarrollar durante el ciclo lectivo. ....

4. Se explicitó la metodología de evaluación que se implementaría durante el Ciclo lectivo. ....

5. Se explicitaron los criterios de evaluación establecidos en el Programa vigente de la asignatura. ....

6. Se hizo referencia a la bibliografía mínima requerida para el desarrollo teórico-práctico de los distintos contenidos disciplinares. ....

7. Se hizo rferencia explícita a los alumnos acerca de las distintas estrategias de aprendizaje que podrían utilizar para favorecer la construcción de conocimientos y el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa oral y escrita. ....

8. Se explicitó el rol que cumpliría cada uno de los docentes integrantes a cargo del dictado de la asignatura (Profesor Titular o Adjunto; Profesor Asistente; Profesor(es) Adscriptos). ....

B. Durante el ciclo lectivo, en su(s) comisión(es):

1. Se orientó a los alumnos acerca de los distintos temas y tipos de ejercicios que se incluirían en las evaluaciones ....

2. Se entrenó a los alumnos en de las distintas estrategias de aprendizaje que podría utilizar para favorecer la construcción de conocimientos. ....

3. Se entenó a los alumnos en el uso de distintas estrategias de aprendizaje para lograr una mayor efectividad en la adquisición de la lengua oral y escrita. ....

4. Se respetó el cronograma de trabajo comunicado al inicio del ciclo lectivo. ....

5. Se utilizó la bibliografía requerida al comienzo del ciclo lectivo para desarrollar los contenidos teórico-prácticos de la signatura. ....

6. Se desarrollaron todos los contenidos teórico-prácticos del programa explicitados al comienzo del ciclo lectivo. ....

7. Se corrigieron en clase la mayor parte de las actividades prácticas incluidas en el material de estudio obligatorio. ....

8. Se respetó la metodología de evaluación explicitada al comienzo del ciclo lectivo. ....

9. Se respetó el rol asignado a cada uno de los miembros del equipo docente que se encuentra a cargo del dictado de la asignatura. ....

5. Por favor, evalúe, según la escala de calificaciones de 1 (nivel más bajo de apreciación personal) a 5 (nivel más alto de apreciación personal) los siguientes aspectos de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje implementados durante el presente ciclo lectivo:

5.1. Clima de trabajo en el aula: ....

5.2. Clima de trabajo con el resto del equipo docente de la Cátedra: ....

5.3. Calidad del material de estudio empleado para el dictado de la asignatura: ....

5.4. Su propio nivel de compromiso con los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje. ....

5.5. Grado de conocimiento de los contenidos disciplinares de la asignatura adquirido por los alumnos al finalizar el dictado de la asignatura. ....

5.6. Actitud del alumno frente al proceso de aprendizaje. ....

5.7. Relación entre el tiempo destinado al desarrollo teórico de los temas y el tiempo dedicado a la implementación de actividades prácticas sobre dichos contenidos teóricos. ....

5.8. Grado de correspondencia entre el tipo de actividades prácticas incluidas en el material de estudio y realizadas o corregidas en clase y el tipo de ejercicios incluidos en las evaluaciones. ....

5.9. Grado de complejidad de las evaluaciones. ....

5.10. Elección de la metodología de enseñanza implementada para el desarrollo de los contenidos teóricos-prácticos. ....

5.11. Grado de participación en clase por parte de los alumnos durante el desarrollo de los contenidos teóricos y corrección de las actividades prácticas. ....

5.12. Disponibilidad de recursos didácticos / tecnológicos. ....

6. Por favor, escriba una X en el casillero correspondiente a cada uno de los enunciados que se señalan a continuación, según su propia apreciación:

6.1. Como docente a cargo del desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos de la asignatura traté de:

	Frecuencia		
	Siempre	*A veces*	*Nunca*
Que los alumnos se interesen por los temas.			

Responder a las preguntas de los alumnos.			
Orientar a los alumnos acerca de bibliografía complementaria para realizar actividades prácticas extra.			
Comentar al curso en general los principales errores cometidos en las evaluaciones.			
Brindar explicaciones al curso en general acerca de cómo subsanar los errores cometidos en las evaluaciones.			
Brindar la posibilidad de realizar consultas para aclarar dudas sobre los temas desarrollados fuera del horario de clase y dentro del ámbito de la Facultad.			
Realizar ejercicios de consolidación, especialmente de aquellos temas que ofrecieron mayor dificultad.			
Utilizar material didáctico variado (pizarrón, manual de cátedra, videos, CDs, tecnologías digitales, etc.) para desarrollar los distintos contenidos teórico-prácticos.			

6.2. Como docente de la Cátedra *Gramática Inglesa I* durante el ciclo lectivo 2010, mi grado de libertad para con cada uno de los aspectos señalados a continuación fue:

Aspecto a evaluar	*Total*	*Parcial*	*Nulo*
Elección de métodos / técnicas de enseñanza-aprendizaje			
Orden en que se dictaron los contenidos teórico-prácticos del programa vigente			
Diseño, elaboración y administración de las evaluaciones parciales			
Diseño, elaboración y administración de los Trabajos Prácticos			
Diseño y elaboración del examen final			
Diseño y / o selección del material didáctico sistematizado			
Selección de bibliografía			

7. Por favor, responda las siguientes preguntas en el espacio provisto para tal fin:

1. ¿Con qué dificultades se encontró durante el cursado de la asignatura?

2. ¿Qué contenidos teóricos desarrollados durante el ciclo lectivo le resultaron más interesantes o útiles a sus alumnos? ¿Por qué?

3. ¿Qué contenidos teóricos le ofrecieron mayor dificultad a los alumnos? ¿Por qué?

4. ¿Cuál es su opinión respecto del material didáctico utilizado para el desarrollo de los contenidos teórico-prácticos en clase? ¿Sugeriría algún cambio? ¿Cuál(es)?

5. En caso de haber entrenado alos alumnos en el uso de estrategias de aprendizaje para estudiar los distintos contenidos teórico-prácticos de esta asignatura, ¿cuáles enseñó?

6. ¿Pudo relacionar los contenidos desarrollados en *Gramática Inglesa I* y los que los alumnos estudiaron y aprendieron en *Práctica Gramatical del Inglés?* En caso de que su respuesta haya sido afirmativa, ¿podría explicar cómo logró realizar dicha relación?. Si Ud. respondió a la pregunta anterior en forma negativa, ¿podría dar las razones por las cuales no logró realizar ninguna conexión entre los contenidos desarrollados en dichas asignaturas?

7. ¿Pudo relacionar los contenidos desarrollados y aprendidos en *Gramática Inglesa I* y los que los alumnos estudiaron y aprendieron en *Lengua Inglesa II, Fonética y Fonología Inglesa I, y/o Lengua Castellana II* ? En caso de que su respuesta haya sido afirmativa, ¿podría explicar cómo logró realizar dicha relación?. Si Ud. respondió a la pregunta anterior en forma negativa, ¿podría dar las razones por las cuales no logró realizar ninguna conexión entre los contenidos desarrollados en dichas asignaturas?

8. ¿Qué cambios sugeriría Ud. para mejorar la calidad académica de los procesos de enseñanza y de aprendizaje en esta asignatura?

9. ¿Está de acuerdo con la modalidad de evaluación implementada en la Cátedra? ¿Por qué?

10. En su opinión, y según su experiencia en el dictado de la asignatura, ¿cuáles son as causas más comunes y/o frecuentes por las cuales algunos alumnos deciden abandonar el cursado de esta materia?