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Alternative Assessment: A Feasible Way to Assess Oral Production Through ICTs

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Yohana Neguimán

Alternative Assessment: A Feasible Way to Assess Oral Production when Using ICTs

Abstract

It is widely known that in Chile only receptive skills are generally developed and assessed. However, different diagnostic tests applied to Chilean students between 2004 and 2010 – which have only measured reading and listening comprehension – have yielded that English language proficiency is low. If the fact that “comprehension precedes production” (Richard-Amato, 2007) is true, then how can we expect Chilean students to communicate in this language?

Changes in the curricula need to be made urgently in order to foster the acquisition or learning of this foreign language, and ICTs are presented in this literature review study as a possible tool of alternative assessment that both develops and assesses speaking skills in English. Grounded on theory – specifically focused on assessment, the speaking skill, and affective factors involved in assessment, – the advantages and disadvantages of using ICTs as a learning and assessment instrument are discussed.

Key words: *receptive skills, assessment, speaking, ICTs*

Introduction

In a globalized world that evolves every day in economic and technological terms, the necessity of having a good command in written and spoken English has become a priority as it is the most accepted language worldwide. The reasons to learn English so urgently arise from the opportunities people may have by mastering the abilities related to the use of this language, which include travelling abroad, applying to a scholarship, and finding a job (Gallagher-Brett, 2010). Thence, it could be said that not only is it important to master receptive skills of the target language, but also the productive ones since most communicative situations require the use of the speaking skill to interact with other people. According to that, in a society that is constantly developing, to master English language skills is clearly necessary to take advantage of all the opportunities that knowing English involves.

Following the previous idea, the Chilean government has emphasized through different means the importance of learning English and the expectations of becoming a bilingual country. The Government has confirmed its interest in the matter by applying international examinations to determine the level of English in Chile. Notwithstanding, the Chilean reality shows an inconvenient truth regarding this topic, as the results that have been obtained by students indicate that there is a poor level of proficiency in the target language. In that regard, it is assumed that there is an inconsistency between what students are supposed to do with their knowledge of the language and what they are actually doing in EFL classrooms. The reason for that inconsistency might rely on the fact that students would not have the right preparation to develop language skills, and teachers would not have an appropriate training regarding assessment. Therefore, despite the Chilean government's concern for the English language, there is still a gap in how

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skills are being developed, and the significance given to each skill, as it seems that only receptive skills are taken into consideration in this country.

This gap has been evidenced by the bad results obtained by Chilean student in standardized tests. The level of English proficiency that learners have shown in receptive skills would not allow them to speak the language either –following Patricia Richard-Amato (2007) idea that without understanding production is impossible,– which results in the necessity of creating authentic and familiarized evaluative methodologies that promote an effective *use* of the target language addressing all students’ learning preferences.

In this regard, it is thought that ICTs might be the best option as, apart from providing students with the opportunity to use the language through tools such as Voicethread, WordPress, Facebook, Google+, among others, they can be used as an authentic tool to assess communicative skills. Besides, as Sonia Rodríguez (2008) states “[t]ools in virtual environments encompass all different kinds of learning because they include techniques for different areas with visual, spoken, logical, aural, intrapersonal, interpersonal and even physical skills” (p.169). Thence, through the use of new technologies in the teaching process of English, students’ performance might be enhanced, as ICTs allow people to make use of the language, even if they have different learning styles.

Nevertheless, even when ICTs are highly used for many purposes, their inclusion in foreign language classrooms is still limited. The Government has created programs for using ICTs for educative purposes, such as the TIC-EDU (*Tecnologías de Infocomunicación Efectivas para la Educación*) Program; however, this initiative has got no projects aimed at developing English language skills through the use of communicational technologies (CONICYT, 2012). For those reasons, to foster the use of ICTs as an adequate resource to enhance oral production, it is necessary to study what the benefits of assessing the speaking competence through technology

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are and why alternative assessment can benefit student's oral performance when using ICTs. In that regard, the present research project will explore the benefits that ICTs offer to develop and assess oral performance.

The basis of this literature review mainly stems from the low level of English proficiency that Chilean students obtained in standardized tests (2004, 2008, and 2010). As a solution, this study poses that ICTs —understood as an alternative assessment tool— can be beneficial to foster, develop and assess oral performance. Therefore, the advantages of using ICTs will be evaluated in the light of learning styles, the affective filter hypothesis and the principles of assessment. It is believed that the use of ICTs might enhance students' oral performance by promoting the real use of the language through contextualized activities —which not only would provide students with comfortable environments at the moment of being assessed, but would also help them develop all the necessary abilities to speak the language.

Finally, in concordance with what has been previously posed, the internal structure of this research paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 contextualizes the present study in Chile and the world. Chapter II informs about concepts related to assessment in general and the assessment of oral production in particular. And Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of using ICTs to assess oral production in English. Hence, after developing this literature review, it is expected to find out what the real advantages of using ICTs in oral production in a foreign language are, whether their use is advisable or not in terms of assessment in the Chilean reality, and why they should be included in speaking tasks.

1. Chapter I: State of the Art

1.1 Assessment in the World

In general, despite its relevance in our lives, assessment is probably one of the elements of the teaching/learning process which is given less importance, since for teachers “assessment is often a final consideration in their planning of the curriculum” (James, 2002, p.4). According to Carl Huberty (1998), there are six reasons that explain why, around the world, the assessment process is not taken seriously by educators. First, teachers do not consider assessment as part of the learning process. Second, educators do not believe in assessment as a means to provide students with feedback. Third, teachers find assessment a complex process, thus they prefer not to spend too much time on it. Fourth, educators worry about students’ anxiety when being assessed. Fifth, teachers think that elaborate assessment is not fairly rewarded in terms of salary. Sixth, educators fear that giving students a bad mark will result in receiving a negative evaluation back.

1.2 Assessment in Chile

International examinations, on the contrary, are taken seriously because of their impact, even though this type of assessment might not be a hundred percent objective or appropriate. In that regard, standardized tests are not suitable all the time as they may restrain what can be assessed or might lack validity as, for example, multiple choice questions can be guessed (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.).

However, Chilean education has trusted in two international institutions that create standardized examinations to measure students’ level of English: the Educational Testing Service and Cambridge ESOL Examinations. These institutions created the Cambridge and TOEIC tests

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applied in Chile as diagnostic tests in 2004 and 2010 to measure 8th and 11th graders' knowledge of English. Results only offered summative data related to receptive skills, same as it happens in classrooms in Chile, where students are mostly taught *about* the language without having to produce in the language (Goh & Burns, 2012).

1.2.1 Cambridge ESOL 2004.

In the year 2004, Cambridge ESOL Examinations implemented an English test to measure the English level of Chilean students. The schools that participated in the test were 299, and 11,000 students of 8th and the 12th grades took the English test. The writing and listening skills were measured to classify students into the following levels: Threshold/ ALTE 2¹, Waystage/ ALTE 1, Lower Breakthrough and Pre Breakthrough, the two latter being levels created especially for the Chilean reality after obtaining very poor results. The majority of the 8th graders achieved the Lower Breakthrough level, while most of 12th graders reached the Breakthrough and Lower Breakthrough levels, which means that they cannot communicate in English at all. The results also showed that only 5% of the students who finish high school have a good command of English to manage in areas of work and education. In conclusion, sadly, the test demonstrated that just a low percentage of students who finish high school achieve the Threshold/ ALTE 2 level, and the rest of students are in the lower levels.

1.2.2 TOIEC Bridge Test 2010 (Chilean SIMCE).

The SIMCE test 2010 was the first national examination developed in South America to measure the level of the English language of high school students. The test for 11th graders was called TOIEC Bridge and, again, only covered receptive skills — reading and listening

¹ The Association of Language Testers in Europe

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comprehension. According to the MINEDUC (2011), the findings showed that only 11% of the students reached the beginner level of English in Chile. The average score obtained was 99 points, which was considerably low in comparison to scores obtained by students in other countries, such as Japan (Japanese high school students obtained an average score of 119). Thus, the SIMCE test provided a general view of the current reality regarding the level of the English language in Chile.

It is clear that the level of English in Chile needs an improvement as the summative data resulting from diagnostic tests makes the low command in English evident. However, the Chilean government is giving way to innovative projects, such as Enlaces and the TIC-EDU projects to reinforce the weaknesses perceived in English skills.

1.3 Use of Technology in Education in Chile

Nowadays, being in contact with technology in educational environments should not be a novelty in Chile, since the majority of our schools have access to technological devices and internet. For example, the Government has implemented the Enlaces project (1992), which attempts to help technology to reach all subsidized Chilean schools (MINEDUC, 2011), despite the economic hindrances resulting from students' social class or the problems of accessibility usually seen in rural areas. Furthermore, the TIC-EDU project (2002) fund was created to widen the benefits that ICTs provide to educational contexts, and facilitate the process of learning (CONICYT, n/d). Those projects will be briefly described below.

1.3.1 Enlaces.

Enlaces is a project created in 1992 MINEDUC (2011), which aimed at promoting a virtual connection between all subsidized schools in Chile. Even though it started as a pilot project tested in 12 schools in Santiago, it has been extended to the whole country as the years have gone by. For many years, Enlaces only provided technological resources to subsidized schools, such as computers, software, and access to the internet; additionally, it also offered training to schools and teachers in order to help them use ICTs properly. Nonetheless, twenty years after its creation, a pilot virtual platform directed to English teaching was recently incorporated to Enlaces, which “facilitates the development of linguistic and grammatical functions, widening the vocabulary, improving writing and providing opportunities to improve the pronunciation of words” (Enlaces, 2012); again, receptive skills mainly.

1.3.2 TIC-EDU.

Additionally, taking advantage of the impact of technology on Chilean students, the Government has created the fund for projects *TIC-EDU (Tecnologías de Infocomunicación Efectivas para la Educación)*, which sponsors several initiatives with educational purposes (CONICYT, n/d). However, being English so important in the current society, TIC-EDU has got no projects related to English or the incorporation of ICTs in foreign language classrooms. As it appears on its website, the majority of the initiatives sponsored by TIC-EDU are related to sciences in education, such a mathematics, biology, and physics (CONICYT, n/d).

1.3.3 Ley SEP.

The incorporation of ICTs in Chilean schools has been developed for many years. Nowadays, there is no excuse for subsidized schools not to have access to technological devices, internet, or the benefits offered by the projects previously mentioned, as the *Ley SEP* (*subvención escolar preferencial*) seeks to facilitate their right to access ICTs in educational environments. According to the MINEDUC (2012), this law aims at providing equal opportunities, and improving the quality of education in institutions with high levels of vulnerability among their students. Schools that are voluntarily subscribed to the *Ley SEP* receive funds for each student in social risk, which can be invested in what is more convenient for the school. However, it seems like there is still a wide gap between the incorporation of ICTs in education and their incorporation in foreign language lessons, as in twenty years there has only been one project related to it.

1.4 Antecedents

After exploring the reality in Chile and the world regarding assessment, some questions have arisen which are addressed at finding out new ways of assessing: First of all, what are the benefits of assessing oral production through ICTs? And secondly, why can ICTs-understood as an alternative assessment tool- benefit students' oral performance? Those questions are the basis of the present research paper and should be answered by the end of this study.

We believe that ICTs promote a suitable environment for students to develop their speaking skills, thus fostering and enhancing oral production. Consequently, in concordance with the research questions and the hypothesis, the benefits of including ICTs as a means of assessment for oral production will be explored through this literature review. In order to do so, we will study why the use of ICTs can enhance oral performance in foreign language assessment; investigate how alternative assessment promotes a suitable environment for students to develop speaking skills; and explore how ICTs help to lower students' affective filter during oral performance. Those objectives will be the guide to follow throughout the whole research project.

1.4.1 Justification of the research.

The results yielded by the SIMCE test in 2010 (MINEDUC, 2011) showed that Chilean students have a poor command in English. Taking into account that the SIMCE test was taken by 11th graders, this reality becomes worrisome as those students have almost completed secondary education, without having reached a basic level of English. In this regard, it must be mentioned that if receptive skills are not well-developed, the chance of producing is certainly improbable as "comprehension precedes production" (Richard-Amato, 2003, p.170). Furthermore, the speaking skill appears to be the most difficult ability to develop among foreign language learners; and it is

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also a hard task for teachers to accurately measure the proficiency of this language skill (Hughes, 2003). However, developing oral skills is extremely important as most communicative situations require the spoken use of the language. Traditionally, in an attempt to provide students with opportunities to practice, many teachers ask them to develop speaking tasks (Brown, 2004), such as dialogues, monologues, and oral presentations that must be performed in front of the class. Nevertheless, it seems extremely difficult for students to practice and use the spoken form of the target language when they do not feel comfortable with the type of task due to several factors, such as the affective filter (Krashen, 1982), and the poor development of the abilities that precede production, as it has been demonstrated through the application of standardized tests (MINEDUC, 2004, 2008, 2010). Having found this problem in the Chilean reality, it is necessary to implement new ways of assessing oral performance in order to help students to develop speaking skills. So, it might be a good idea to include the use of ICTs in oral examinations as they could benefit performance and might be motivating for students.

2. Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Speaking Skill

According to Keith Johnson (1996), the speaking skill is a “combinatorial skill [which] involves a high element of doing various things at the same time” (p.155). The speaking skill, then, entails mastering multiple abilities that will help the learner be competent in the language. In words of Christine Goh and Anne Burns (2012), these abilities are divided into three: knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills, and discourse strategies—which enable the speaker to produce accurate utterances, overcoming language difficulties. Martin Bygate (1987) refers to this skill saying that “by giving learners ‘speaking practice’ and ‘oral exams’ we recognize that there is a difference between knowledge about a language and skill in using it” (p.3). Goh and Burns (2012) add that because the high-stakes examination mostly assess the knowledge about the language and not performance, teachers tend to focus more on grammar, providing activities that make students speak but without teaching them all the abilities to produce the language. Therefore, in order to assess both, knowledge and performance, the teacher should create activities or speaking tasks that allow student to show their abilities in different communicative contexts and with different levels of complexity. At the same time, as assessment is a complex process, the teacher should follow some recommendations from experts and design tools to evaluate the speaking skill more effectively, and actually measure students’ competence to speak.

2.1.1 Speaking competence.

The concept of speaking competence, according to Dell Hymes (1971), refers to the combination of linguistic knowledge and particular skills that enable the speaker to use the

target language. Thence, the speaking competence would not only involve the ability of understanding the grammar of a language but also the capability of using the linguistic knowledge in a variety of communicative situations (Bagarić, 2007).

Michael Canale and Merrill Swain (1980) also refer to the speaking skill by developing a model called the communicative competence which is composed of four elements: Grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences. According to Goh and Burns (2012), grammatical competence deals with the knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, and phonology. Discourse competence is the ability to connect words or phrases to develop a coherent speech. Sociolinguistic competence involves the capability of using the language appropriately following certain rules and in specific sociocultural situations. Finally, strategic competence denotes the ability to make use of verbal or non-verbal communication to overcome difficulties at the moment of speaking.

Then, Goh and Burns (2012) improve the model, mentioned before, to describe the second language speaking competence, which can also be applied to foreign language learning. This model has three categories: Knowledge of language and discourse, core speaking skills and discourse strategies, which should be developed in order to produce an accurate and fluent speech appropriate for different communicative situations. Hence, the speaking competence requires that speakers gradually develop specific abilities, explained below.

2.1.1.1 Linguistic knowledge.

According to Robert Matthews (2003), linguistic knowledge consist in knowing the rules and principles of grammar, which must be followed to be understood . Besides, Sari Luoma (2004) states that “[l]anguage knowledge refers to various kinds of knowledge in the user’s

memory” (p.98). She also points out that learner’s performance in the target language is usually assessed in relation to the knowledge of the language (*ibid*), which is complemented by Birgit Harley, Allen Patrick, Jim Cummins, & Merrill Swain (1990), who specify that language proficiency tended to be related to grammar and lexis. Fortunately, the communicative competence approach (Canale & Swain, 1980) to language teaching started to associate language abilities with the capacity of using language in varied communicative situations. However, because high-stake examinations tend to assess knowledge over performance, nowadays, English teachers focus more on grammar than the comprehensive abilities that speaking involves (Goh & Burns, 2012).

2.1.1.2 Core speaking skills.

Within the second element of speaking competence, there are four core skills: Pronunciation, speech function, interaction management, and discourse management, which must be accomplished in order to put into practice the knowledge of the language (Goh & Burns, 2012). According to Paul Nation and John Newton (2009), pronunciation “includes the articulation of individual sounds and the distinctive features of sounds like voicing and aspiration, voice setting-feature (Esling and Wong, 1983) and stress and intonation” (p.76). Then, in relation to speech function, Andrew Cohen (1996) identifies five types of speech acts which are divided according to specific communicative contexts: Representative, directive, expressive, comissive and declarative. With regard to interaction management, Bygate (1987) states that learners need skills to help them interact with other speakers maintaining conversations and negotiating meanings. Finally, Goh and Burns (2012) refer to discourse organization as “the ability of speakers to organize extended discourse in accordance with accepted linguistic and sociocultural conventions” (p 62). Hence, these four skills enable learners to produce a speech

which is accurate and appropriate to conventional rules and communicative purposes, and to communicate with other speakers as well.

2.1.1.3 Communication and discourse strategies.

The third aspect of speaking is the communicative strategy; according to Goh and Burns (2012), “these include cognitive or psychological strategies, metacognitive strategies, and interactional strategies [that] enable learners to overcome lexical gaps, negotiate meaning, repair communication breakdowns, and enhance the discourse that they and their interlocutors are jointly producing” (p.67). Maya Khemlani David (1999) refers to these communicative strategies by saying that they can help speakers to deal with both grammatical and lexical difficulties. She identifies two types of communicative strategies: Formal reduction strategies — which eliminate certain elements of the language without interfering in the meaning; and functional reduction strategies, which help to get the meaning across, such as circumlocution, simplification, paraphrasing, translation, formulaic expressions, repetition, language shift, appeal for assistance, codeswitching and gestures. Thence, communicative strategies are all those cognitive, metacognitive, and interactional strategies that successfully help learners overcome all language difficulties encountered at the moment of speaking and interacting with other interlocutors.

2.1.2 Speaking skill assessment.

Regarding speaking skill assessment, Arthur Hughes (2003) states that “the accurate measurement of oral ability is not easy. It takes considerable time and effort, including training, to obtain valid and reliable results” (p.134). As assessing the speaking skill is a complex activity, teachers must bear in mind that they have to follow considerations before testing, creating speaking tasks, and evaluating students’ performance according to rubrics in order to obtain more

objective results (*ibid.*). In relation to the considerations to evaluate students' performance, it is advisable to use rubrics and to count with multiple raters (*ibid.*), as well as students' levels of proficiency and contents, among others. With regard to the creation of speaking tasks, Douglas Brown (2004) describes five types of speaking activities: Imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive, which should be presented according to students' levels of proficiency, being imitative tasks the most simple and extensive tasks the most complex. Finally, in order to assess speaking tasks in a more effective way, Hughes (2004) (among other authors, such as Ur, 2007; Luoma, 2004, etc.) recommends the use of rubrics, which allow the teacher to assess all the abilities that speaking involves. These three elements are further developed below.

2.1.2.1 Considerations when planning speaking tasks.

According to Christine Coombe, Keith Folse & Nancy Hubley (2007), there are at least three factors that the teachers should consider before designing tests for oral production: Accuracy, fluency, and assessment criteria.

Regarding accuracy and fluency, Coombe *et al.* advise to equally focus on both abilities. Brown (2004), however, states that teachers can choose to focus on one of them. Nonetheless, regardless the choice, it must be reflected on the assessment tool. It is also advisable to consider whether students' performance actually interferes with communication or not. In this direction, then, teachers should assess according to accuracy (grammar), fluency (ability to express ideas), and also vocabulary (pronunciation, intonation, stress) and content, which should be clearly stated in the assessment criteria (Coombe *et al.*, 2007).

Finally, they also state that to avoid subjectivity, it might be more effective to assess oral production through the use of multiples raters, who could be in charge of different tasks, such as

making notes and interacting with the students. Furthermore, Luoma (2004) states that examiners “have to make sure that their tasks give enough material for rating these features, and that they develop the criteria that serve their needs” (p. 11), which will depend on the students’ different proficiency levels and appropriate speaking tasks.

2.1.2.2 Speaking tasks.

In order to assess, the teacher must create different activities which ask learners to use the language according to their levels of language and speaking purposes. Lyle Bachman and Adrian Palmer (1996) pose that speaking tasks “can be seen as activities that involve speakers in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular speaking situation” (p.44).

Brown (2004) identifies five speaking tasks: Imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive (as it has been previously mentioned). Imitative tasks do not require interaction or conveying a message; these activities mainly focus on pronunciation through the imitation of words or phrases. Intensive tasks are those activities such as reading aloud, dialogue completion, and direct response, in which interaction with other interlocutors is minimal; however, learners must show competence in terms of grammar, lexical, phrases, and phonetics. Regarding responsive tasks, interaction and speech comprehension are required, as the activities involve small talk. Interactive tasks are more extended than the previous ones and might require the interaction of multiple interlocutors through interviews or dialogues; besides, their purpose is to exchange specific or personal information. Finally, extensive tasks are those activities which consist in monologues, speeches, oral presentations, or story-telling. In conclusion, speaking tasks are those activities that enable students to develop their linguistic skills, while allowing

teachers to assess students' performance in the target language; these tasks should be created according to the students' levels of language and different communicative purposes.

2.1.2.3 Rubrics.

According to Louma (2004), the rubric is an assessment tool that contains criteria for the performance that is going to be assessed. These criteria are scored depending on achievement levels or standards and include “any information material that the developers may produce” (p. 51); in other words, criteria involve the objectives of the task. When creating a rubric, a teacher must clearly state his/ her expectations regarding the outcomes of the task so that students can plainly know “how to meet these expectations” (Goodrich, n/d). Brown (2004) emphasizes the importance of following the criteria of the rubric when assessing oral production, so the assessment can be more objective and fair. That is to say, the student must be assessed based on his/her performance, and not in comparison to his/her peers' performance. The use of rubrics as a tool in assessing spoken skills is mandatory in order to clarify what is expected from learners, and to assess objectively in concordance with these expectations.

In conclusion, the speaking skill is an ability that involves not only knowledge about the language but also the capability of using the language in varied communicative situations and following the model of communicative competence. Oral production assessment is a difficult task that teachers must accomplish considering certain steps and suggestions that help him/her assess students' performance more accurately and objectively. Regarding the recommendations, educators should set the objectives of their assessment tool beforehand, and count on more than one rater to assess oral performance. Assessment should be based on the creation of speaking

activities which make students use the language according to their level and communicative purposes, and then be assessed following an objective assessment tool, such as rubrics.

However, although teachers can plan beforehand, there always are external variables that cannot be control, such as the testees' feelings or emotions at the moment of being assessed.

2.2 Affective Filter Theory and Oral Performance

Affective variables experienced by students during Foreign Language lessons appear to be a reality in almost every classroom around the world (Krashen, 1985; Oya *et al*, 2004; Bailey et al 1999; Warr & Downing, 2000). These affective variables can easily become a hindrance for language acquisition, because they can pose a “mental block that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device” (Krashen, 1985, p.100). Stephen Krashen ([1985] 2009) emphasizes that those who have a high affective filter will not be able to produce as well as the ones whose affective filter is low because, “even if they understand the message, input will not reach the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition” (p. 31); in consequence, neither intake nor output will occur (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). According to Krashen, the affective filter includes motivation, attitudes, and anxiety; therefore, these concepts will be developed below.

2.2.1 Motivation.

Motivation is closely related to willingness to communicate in foreign language contexts; and “it can determine success or failure in any learning situation” (Kiil, 2010, p. 6). Krashen (1982) states that “performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition” (p. 31). According to Zoltán Dörnyei (2001), motivation “is an abstract, hypothetical

concept used to explain why people think and behave as they do” (p.1); it is not related to the aptitudes a student has to master the foreign language, but to the desire to learn and acquire it.

Many researchers have divided motivation into integrative and instrumental motivation (Richard-Amato, 2003; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1960). For example, Robert Gardner states that this classification depends on the reason “why an individual is studying a language; it refers to the goal” (p. 51). He also adds that “individuals who are truly motivated not only strive to learn the material but also seek out situations where they can obtain further practice” (*ibid*, p. 50). These realities turn motivation into an important factor to consider in foreign language lessons, since they can affect the quality of oral production, and determine students’ own goals towards the FL.

2.2.1.1 Integrative motivation.

According to Patricia Richard-Amato (2003), integrative motivation is related to foreign language learners’ interest in incorporating the culture of the foreign language into their own realities, thus identifying themselves with it. Integrative motivated students are usually influenced by the media (Kiil, 2010), which express cultural features of a community. As Robert Gardner and William Lambert (1972) pose

The acquisition of a new language involves much more than mere acquisition of a new set of verbal habits. The language student must be willing to adopt appropriate features of behavior, which characterize members of another linguistic community. The words, grammatical patterns, mode of pronunciation, and the sounds themselves should have significance for the learner that goes

beyond simple translations or equivalences given by a teacher, grammar book, or dictionary. (p. 14)

That is to say, in order to acquire a foreign language, not only is it important to learn its linguistic components, but also to desire to become part of the community that speaks the target language. This is what integrative motivation is about. Gardner and Lambert (1972) also state that “an integrative and friendly outlook toward the other group whose language is being learned can differentially synthesize the learner to the audio-lingual features of the language, making him more perceptive to form of pronunciation and accent” (p. 134). In this regard, integrative motivation plays an important role in oral production, because it helps students to master the verbal elements of the foreign language.

2.2.1.2 Instrumental motivation.

Instrumental motivation is related to the practical goals a person might have when learning a foreign language (Richard-Amato, 2003). Thus, the individual develops his/her language skills in concordance with his/her “desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 14). Instrumental motivation appears to be a key point in foreign language acquisition. Kiil (2010) describes it as follows: “in a classroom setting, pupils who have instrumental motivation regard English as a means to an end, for instance getting a good grade, or being able to travel around the world” (p. 8). Robert Gardner and Peter MacIntyre (1995) add that “instrumentally motivated students studied longer than non-instrumentally motivated students when there was an opportunity to profit from learning” (p. 207). Consequently, instrumental motivation helps students to learn the foreign language in order to accomplish their personal goals.

2.2.2 Attitudes.

The students' attitude towards something has a significant importance in foreign language oral production; in fact, "performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better in second language acquisition" (Krashen, 1982, p. 30). This refers to the attitudes students have regarding themselves, and towards the foreign language. They can be influenced by several aspects, especially by "people in the immediate environment: Parents, teachers, and peers" (Richard-Amato, 2003). For this reason, to explore the influence of the attitudes towards the self, and towards the target language is a relevant point to cover.

2.2.2.1 Attitudes towards the self in FLA.

Self-image and self-esteem seem to have a significant importance in foreign language acquisition. Adelaide Heyde (1979) found out that "students with high self-esteem at all levels performed better in the language they were studying" (as cited in Richard-Amato, 2003, p. 111). By the same token, Taeko Oya, Emmanuel Manalo and Jackie Greenwood (2004) suggest that "extraverted individuals may be more fluent when speaking in a second language" (p. 842). In addition, Deborah Busch (1982) finds a close relationship between self-confidence and pronunciation, while Jean-Marc Dewaele and Adrian Furnham (2000) add that the length of the sentence when speaking is significantly related to high self-confidence. Hence, students' self-esteem and self-image appears to be directly related to the quality of oral production.

2.2.2.2 Attitudes towards the target language and willingness to communicate.

The attitude an individual adopts towards the target language is closely related to motivation. According to Gardner & Lambert (1972) those who have more favorable attitudes

toward another language and culture are more likely to acquire the foreign language. Hence, the student's attitudes toward the target language have a close relationship with integrative motivation. Thus, the previous concepts are related to how the student accepts, not just the foreign language, but the foreign culture. This acceptance will determine the student's willingness to communicate using the foreign language, which according to Gardner (1960) involves "an interest in an exchange of significant impressions, ideas and concerns about a wide range of subjects, and not merely a personality trait of extraversion and/or talkativeness" (p. 10). Consequently, students' attitude toward the foreign language might facilitate or debilitate their speech production.

2.2.3 Anxiety.

Anxiety plays an important role in foreign language acquisition. There are various aspects related to this topic, which, according to Krashen (1982), can create a mental barrier that affects language production positively or negatively. Charles Spielberger (1966) defines anxiety as "subjective, consciously perceived feelings of apprehension and tension, accompanied by or associated with activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 15). In this regard, anxiety can affect considerably the quality of oral performance as it appears to be a stressful situation (Hee Jung Lee, 1991). In contrast, Krashen (1982) adds that "low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety" (p.30); hence, anxiety might be a facilitative or debilitative factor for foreign language acquisition, depending on its level. The former encourages students to develop tasks, giving them the confidence to use the foreign language, while the latter makes them feel nervous and insecure, and makes them adopt an attitude of avoidance towards the task and unwillingness to speak (Spielberger, 1966).

2.2.3.1 Types of anxiety

Although many researchers differentiate just two types of anxiety, Daniel Yu-ching and Go-cheng Wu (2004) classify anxiety into three types: Trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. When students experience trait anxiety, they feel anxious about many situations all the time. If students experience state anxiety, it means it is temporary only. And regarding situation-specific anxiety, a particular situation make students always feel uncomfortable. All of these types of anxieties can affect the quality of the oral performance equally, depending on the context and the type of anxiety the student is suffering from. For those reasons, it is very important to consider affective variables regarding anxiety in foreign language classroom settings.

2.2.3.1.1 Trait anxiety.

Trait anxiety corresponds to a constant feeling of nervousness; as Mohammad Javad (2011) states “trait anxiety is the tendency of a person to be nervous or feel anxious irrespective of the situation he/she is exposed to” (p. 908). In other words, a student who suffers from trait anxiety is likely to feel nervous, scared and anxious in situations that are not necessarily threatening. In this regard, Richard-Amato defines trait anxiety as a “predisposition towards feeling anxious” (p. 116), which makes a person have “anxiety state reactions disproportionate in intensity to the magnitude of the objective danger; it is a relatively permanent and steady personality feature” (Yu-ching & Wu, 2004, p. 291). That is to say, trait anxiety is inherent in a student’s personality.

2.2.3.1.2 *State anxiety.*

State anxiety has been defined as a temporal feeling prior to doing something important. As Richard-Amato (2003) poses, state anxiety appears to be a feeling of apprehension experienced at a particular moment in time, for example, prior to taking exams: it appears in confrontation of the perceived threat (Yu-ching & Wu, 2004). In other words, state anxiety occurs when a student is exposed to a stressful situation, such as oral examinations, responding to it with a feeling of tension. This type of anxiety is temporary, and “it diminishes over time as the learners get used to the new environment or feel comfortable with the teacher” (Javad, 2011, p. 908).

2.2.3.1.3 *Situation-specific anxiety.*

Situation-specific anxiety has been commonly linked to state anxiety, but “unlike trait and state perspective, situation-specific perspective requires the respondents to ascribe their anxiety to particular sources” (Yu-ching & Wu, 2004, p. 291). According to Zsuzsa Tóth (2010) when suffering from this type of anxiety “[t]he same individual may feel anxious in one type of situation and not in others. Thus, situation-specific anxieties are seen as anxieties experienced in certain well-defined situations” (p.8). In other words, a student might feel anxious when speaking in public in English, but not when doing the same action in Spanish. Situation-specific anxiety can affect oral production significantly because it “can manifest itself via a distortion of sounds, inability to produce the intonation and rhythm of the language, ‘freezing up’ when called on perform, and forgetting words or phrases just learned or simply refusing to speak and remaining silent” (Young, 1990. p.542). For this reason, foreign language anxiety has been classified as a type of situation-specific anxiety; and there are three aspects that more frequently produce

foreign language anxiety in oral production: Communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear to negative evaluation (*ibid*).

2.3 Language Assessment

Language assessment uses a system that covers measurement, evaluation, testing, and assessment, in which four functions can be identified: Formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative (Brown, 2004). Additionally, Christine Coombe and Nancy Hubley (2003) state that “now assessment includes a broad range of tools and techniques that range from testing an individual student’s ability to evaluating an entire language teaching program” (p.1).

In order to assess individual or group’s achievement accurately and effectively, Brown (2004) proposes that tests must follow the five principles of assessment: Practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. Besides, alternative assessment is also suggested as an option to motivate students to learn and use the language in real/authentic contexts (*ibid*). Thence, language assessment involves measurement, evaluation, testing, and assessment, and it has multiples functions that help the teacher evaluate the student’s progress and achievements. In addition, to obtain feasible results, the educator should plan his/her assessment practices taking into account the principles of assessment and the creation of alternative tests that are more authentic and motivate students to learn and use the language.

2.3.1 Measurement, evaluation, testing, and assessment.

Measurement, evaluation, testing, and assessment are frequently understood as concepts that share the same function and meaning. However, these terms differ from each other due to the fact that each of them plays specific roles within the assessment process. In this regard, they have

evident differences: On the one hand, evaluation conveys the meaning of the scores or descriptions that measurement has assigned to students' performance. On the other hand, assessment is a continuous process that covers all the techniques and methods used to evaluate, such as testing, which is an explicit and structured instrument to measure performance (Brown, 2004). Hence measurement, evaluation, testing, and assessment are different in terms of function, but they all possess a shared objective of contributing towards a more detailed view of the learner's command in the target language.

2.3.1.1 Measurement.

Measurement refers to the observations made by the teacher by verifying learners' development in different tests that can measure general or specific abilities in the target language (Brown, 2004). Besides, Lyle Bachman states that there are quantitative (quantifiable reports) and qualitative descriptions (non-quantifiable reports) in the measurement aspect of assessing (as cited in Brown, 2004). Furthermore, Bachman (1990) adds that "the key measurement problem is determining the extent to which the sample of language use we obtain from a test adequately characterizes the overall potential language use of the individual" (p.11). Thus, measurement includes quantitative and quantifiable descriptions of students' performance on specific tests; however, it is important that teachers make the necessary observations to obtain an effective view of students' achievements.

2.3.1.2 Evaluation.

According to Bachman (2004), "evaluation involves making value judgments and decisions, [it] can be best understood as one possible use of assessment, although judgments and decisions are often made in absence of information from assessment" (p.12). In relation to

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Bachman's contribution, Brown (2004) points out that "evaluation can take place without measurement, as in, for example, a teacher's appraisal of a student's correct oral response with words like 'excellent insight, Fernando!'"(p.5). Therefore, evaluation reflects the judgment of the rater about students' performance, which helps teachers make decisions about future steps to follow and motivate learners through the use of positive phrases such as "excellent!" or "good job!"

2.3.1.3 Testing.

As previously mentioned, testing refers to the structured and explicit instruments which evaluate students' performance. In relation to the aim of testing, Penny Ur (2010) states that its purpose is "to convey how well the testee knows or can do something [...] the test gives a score which is assumed to define the level of knowledge of the testee " (p.33). Additionally, Bachman (1990) adds

The single most important consideration in both the development of language tests and the interpretation of their results is the purpose or purposes the particular tests are intended to serve. The two major uses of language tests are: (1) As sources of information for making decisions within the context of educational programs; and (2) as indicators of abilities or attributes that are of interest in research on language, language acquisition, and language teaching. (p. 54)

Besides, in order to obtain valid information, Brown (2010) poses that "testers need to understand who the test-takers are. What are their previous experiences and backgrounds? Is the test appropriately matched to their abilities? How should test-takers interpret their scores?" (p. 4).

Thence, testing consists in the use of explicit and structured tests that, in order to be effective, must be developed taking into consideration students backgrounds and abilities.

2.3.1.4 Assessment.

According to Coombe (2007), assessment consists in a set of procedures from observing learners' management in the lesson to preparing large tests. In this regard, assessment does not only involve evaluating, but, as Coombe *et al.* (2007) mention, "assessment includes the phases of planning, development, administration, analysis, feedback, and reflection" (p. 1). Assessment is an important part of teaching that serves for teacher to prepare future lessons; as Richard-Amato (2003) points out, "assessment as an ongoing process accomplished daily through classroom interaction can serve as a guide to further instruction based on what students demonstrate they need to learn at any given moment" (p. 195). Furthermore, assessment can have a significant effect on the teaching/learning process, because, as Krashen (1982) states, it influences students' behaviour towards the target language; therefore, it is necessary to prepare types of assessment that encourage the learner to feel motivated to use the language. Hence, assessment is a process which involves multiple tasks from designing a test to give students feedback; additionally, it guide teachers in future decisions and appears to influence students' performance in terms of motivation.

2.3.1.4.1 Assessment functions.

With regard to the function of language assessment, Brown (2004) suggests that before designing tests, teachers must ask themselves what the purpose of the test is, which allows them to choose the appropriate instrument for specific communicative situations. Therefore, each test has a determined function and in that regard, Cedric Cullingford (1995) states that there are four

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categories: “Formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative. The first two are essential to help the child’s development. The latter two are more concerned with testing what kind of help and support the child is getting” (p. 152). Thus, these four purposes of assessment help the teacher to obtain students’ performance results, and that specific information enables them to make decisions and improve their achievements in the target language.

- Formative and Diagnostic Assessment

Laura Greenstein (2010) and Cullingford (1995) say formative and diagnostic assessment aim at exploring students’ progress in the learning process and finding the barriers that impede them to have a good command of the language. With regard to formative assessment, Greenstein (2010) poses that

[it] is purposefully directed toward the student. It does not emphasize how teachers deliver information but, rather, how students receive that information, how well they understand it, and how they can apply it. With formative assessment, teachers gather information about their students’ progress and learning needs and use this information to make instructional adjustments. (p.16)

On the other hand, “diagnostic assessment is concerned with finding out any learning difficulties the pupil might have, and what particular characteristics the pupil brings to the work” (Cullingford, 1995, p. 152). Hence, both formative and diagnostic assessment serve as means for the teacher to identify to what extent the learner has learnt and what his/her difficulties in the language are, which might help him/her use that information to plan future lessons in order to strengthen students’ weaknesses.

- Summative and Evaluative Assessment

In relation to summative evaluation, McKay (2006) points out that summative assessment helps educators and others to know about students' progress over a certain period of time. Additionally, it also allows teachers to make decisions, based on this type of assessment, such as accepting students into the next level of schooling (*ibid*). Regarding the impact of summative assessment on teaching and learning, Ur (1991) states that "summative evaluation may contribute little or nothing to the ongoing teaching/learning process; but it is part of the teacher's job, something we need to know how to do effectively" (p. 245). On the other hand, Graham Butt (2010) argues that evaluative assessment indicates if the teaching practice is being successful or not. Besides, Cullingford (1995) states "evaluative assessment is concerned with learning something about the achievements of a class, or a school as a whole, so that there is some indication of the success or failure of a particular part of the curriculum" (1995, p.153). To conclude, summative assessment, is one of the teacher's tasks, which indicates students' performance based on scoring rate; and evaluative assessments allows to make general judgments about a student' s, class, school or curriculum achievements.

2.3.1.4.2 Principles of assessment.

As it has been previously mentioned, Brown (2004) states that there are five principles that should be met in all kinds of assessment: Practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. In relation to tests, Penny McKay (2006) points out that it is a must to prepare reliable and valid assessment procedures in order to make a judgment based on summative tests. Furthermore, regarding evaluation feasibility and affective issues, Ur (1991) mentions that summative tests do not always yield objective performance results, because sometimes they do

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not test what is taught to children. In addition, tests can become very stressful if they are the only type of assessment conducted. Thence, in order to obtain accurate test results of students' performance, teachers should base their assessment practices on the five principles as their objective is to design tests that are practical, reliable, authentic, valid and that have a positive impact on students. Further detail about these principles is given below.

- Practicality

According to Harris (1969), practicality refers to whether a test is economical, easy to score, and easy to interpret (as cited in Krashen, 1982, p. 176). Richard-Amato (2003) poses some questions in order to detect whether the type of assessment that is being used is practical or not

Will enough trained persons be available to develop the test, create test tasks, give the test, and score it? What equipment will be needed? Will that equipment be available?

What is the cost of the test? Is it affordable? Is there enough time available for giving the test? (p. 180).

Hence, if the test is practical in terms of money, scoring, result interpretations, etc., the test will follow the principle and will be advisable to conduct.

- Reliability

According to Lawrence Rudner and William Shafer (2002), reliability is “the degree to which test scores for a group of test takers are consistent over repeated applications of a measurement procedure” (p. 16). Complementing the former definition, Robert Lado (1961) asks a couple of questions that determine if the test results would be the same in different situations,

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and if the results would differ much from one to another. In addition, Brown (2004) suggests that the principle of reliability must have the following characteristics

- is consistent in its conditions across two or more administrations
- gives clear directions for scoring/evaluation
- has uniform rubrics for scoring/evaluation
- capacity to lend itself to consistent application of those rubrics by the scorer
- contains items/tasks that are unambiguous to the test-taker. (p.27)

In conclusion, the principle of reliability of a test lies in obtaining the same results after repeatedly giving the test, which will depend on the objectivity of the test in terms of administration, rater's evaluation, student's emotional states, rubrics and content (Brown, 2004).

- Validity

As Hughes (2003) states, “a test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what is intended to measure” (p.26). He adds that in order to know whether a test is valid or not, the teacher must take into consideration two important aspects at the time of preparing the test: Content validity and criterion-related validity. The former verifies if the contents in the test effectively measure the skills that are supposed to be measured, and the latter is related to whether or not the test results agree with the results yielded by other forms of assessment given. Thence, validity is essential in the system of assessment as it detects whether a test is well-founded in terms of content, and it also compares results among different types of evaluations.

- Authenticity

According to Bachman (1990), authentic tests are those in which students are asked to use the language in real-life performances and meaningful situations. Furthermore, Butt (2010) points out that authenticity involves teachers preparing tests that include the abilities that have been taught and learnt. In order to illustrate the previous point, Butt (2010) also states that

[s]tudents would therefore have to show that they can actually perform relevant tasks – for example, getting a musician to play a piece of music, a linguist to speak in a foreign language, or a geographer to carry out an enquiry in the field. (p.56)

In short, tests must be relevant and advocate to measure what has been taught and learnt during a period of time by asking students to use the language significantly.

- Washback or Backwash

The concept of washback or backwash is known as the principle that refers to the impact that tests have on students' performance. In that regard, Hughes (2003) states that “*backwash* [...] can be harmful or beneficial” (p.1). Regarding the negative effects of this principle, Lorraine Valdez Pierce (2003) mentions that “misuse of large-scale testing have greatly troubled teachers over the years. One negative effect that has been particularly troubling is the constant pressure placed on them to improve test score. Often such pressure has led to *teaching to the test*” (as cited in Richard-Amato, 2003, p. 201). In relation to the positive impact of washback on students, Coombe *et al.* (2007) point out that tests can benefit learners' performance if evaluations are clear in terms of the course outcome and if they represent and give a sense of accomplishment to students. Hence, backwash or washback can affect the teaching/ learning process positively or

negatively, which will depend on if the teacher creates tests that agree with the course goals and give students a sense of achievement or failure, among other factors.

2.3.2 Alternative assessment.

According to Greenstein (2010), alternative assessment refers to other methods that are different from the traditional “pencil-and-paper tests”, such as portfolios, role plays, journals, etc., which could benefit students’ performance, because they boost communication in the foreign language among students in the classroom in real-life situations. Besides, it is thought that they offer greater validity because [...] all steps are taken to make the tasks as authentic as possible (Quian, 2009, p. 115).

In relation to the advantages of using alternative assessment, Leslie Opp-Beckman and Sarah Klinghammer (2006) point out that

- Learners make real use of the target language – in this case, English – for an actual purpose. The language is a means of communication.
- Learners demonstrate what they have actually learned and how well they can use what they have learned. Criteria or guidelines based on the goals of the class are set up in advance so both teachers and students know what needs to be done to successfully complete the class.
- Learners get involved in their own evaluation. Understanding how to evaluate themselves enables learners to take responsibility for and self-direct some of their own learning.
- Learners’ motivation to learn and use the language may be increased.
- It gives learners the chance to directly display their progress to family members and others in their school and community. (p.105)

Furthermore, Tim McNamara (2000) states that the use of alternative assessment is an effective way to address all the curriculum objectives, to make a connection between teaching and learning, and to enable students to be responsible and aware of their own learning process through the use of self-assessment. In conclusion, alternative assessment has positive impacts on the teaching/learning process, which allows the students to use the language in significant situations, feel motivated towards learning, be responsible for their own assessment, and become aware of their achievements.

2.3.2.1 Alternative assessment practices.

Alternative assessment includes activities such as projects, portfolios, posters, presentations, self-assessment, self-record-keeping, peer feedback and assessment, performance assessment, observations, conferences/interviews, learning logs, and journals (Brown, 2004; Opp-Beckman & Klinghammer, 2006; Greenstein, 2010).

Regarding these alternative assessment activities, Neus Figueras (2005) introduces the DIALANG² project in her journal, which combines self-assessment, performance assessment, feedback and technology. In relation to the benefits of DIALANG, the author states that this initiative gives students feedback, and allows them to build their learning independently. Moreover, “DIALANG have [*sic*] learners as their focus, and [it] show[s] creative ways of reconciling learning, teaching, and assessment” (Figueras, 2005, p. 53). Consequently, alternative assessment can involve several activities, which can be combined and have a positive impact on the teaching/learning process, such as helping students to be in charge of their own learning and to feel motivated towards the target language.

² DIALANG project (www.dialang.org) is a Diagnostic Language Assessment System which is available on the Internet in 14 different languages.

2.3.2.2 Performance-based assessment.

In concordance with Valdez (2002), who holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Georgetown University, the use of performance-based assessment helps students to develop thinking skills and connects evaluation with teaching, although Brown (2004) warns that preparing performance-based assessment is time consuming. However, this type of assessment gives more accurate and objective results as it evaluates students' abilities in simulated/real tasks. Additionally, it also respects the content validity principle because students are assessed regarding what they have been taught, using the target language.

In conclusion, performance-based assessment allows students to be measured in a valid way and makes them use the target language in significant contexts. In this sense, ICTs can be perfectly considered an alternative assessment tool to measure students' productive skills.

2.4 ICTs in Education

Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) include a wide range of technological tools. As Victoria Tinio (2002) states, “these technologies include computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony” (p. 4). In that regard, Professor Craig Blurton (2002) defines ICTs as a “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, and manage International Education Studies information” (p.46). Consequently, the term “ICT” appears to include any electronic device used with communicative purposes. ICTs have been increasingly used for educational purposes in several countries –Chile included– because of the advantages and facilities they offer to education (Blurton, 2002). In consequence, the use of ICTs has gain a good acceptance in educational environments.

2.4.1 ICTs for learning.

Using ICTs in classrooms can provide several advantages for learners. For example, it can prepare students for their future workplaces, since technology has a significant importance in the 21st century jobs (Tinio, 2002). Besides, it can “reduce that sense of isolation usually perceived in foreign language classrooms; furthermore, they provide access to a wide range of authentic materials” (World Bank, 1998, as cited in Blurton, 2002). In other words, these tools are useful elements for students’ instruction, since they have provided a wide range of “forms of learning such as online learning, e-Learning, technology, mediated learning, online collaborative learning, virtual learning, web-based learning, and blended learning” (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen, 2011, p.130). In relation to that, Tinio (2002) states that electronic learning and blended learning are the most relevant, because of their contributions and their use in classrooms. Hence, ICTs have been the basis of new ways of learning as the use of technology reduces the geographical barriers, making learning more contextualized.

2.4.1.1 Electronic learning (e-learning).

ICTs provide a wide range of tools for teachers to use in their lessons; those can include from a radio to interactive boards. The inclusion of computers in education has generated the term e-learning, which has to do with the use of technological devices such as computers, and the internet as learning tools. According to Naser-Nick Manochehr (2006)

E-learning refers to using electronic applications and processes to learn. E-learning applications and processes include web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the internet, intranet, extranet, satellite TV, and CD-ROM with multimedia capabilities. (p.18)

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E-learning has also been closely linked to online learning and distant learning; the former has to do with using internet resources to deliver the contents, while the second one is related to the use of ICTs to create virtual classrooms, in which teachers and learners can have a difference in both, time and space (Moore *et al*, 2011). Thus, e-learning refers to the use of devices, especially computers, to create virtual classrooms in which students can interact and develop different tasks with the use of internet or intranet systems.

2.4.1.2 Blended learning (*b-learning*).

E-learning is a very well-known concept in education, but recently, blended learning (b-learning) has gained a good reputation among educators and researchers. Antonio Bartolomé (2004) describes b-learning as the response to the failure of the expectations that e-learning has generated in educational terms. In words of George Marsh (2003), b-learning “combines face-to-face and virtual teaching” (as cited in Bartolomé, 2004); in other words, as its name describes, b-learning is related to the combination of computer-based and online resources, and direct interaction between the teacher and the student. In that sense, it has helped notoriously to reduce the costs of education in terms of didactic materials in classrooms (*ibid*). In conclusion, b-learning combines the benefits of ICTs through the use of different tools as a means of assessment, and the human capability to differentiate and consider the individual differences of every student.

2.4.2 ICTs in foreign language acquisition.

The usefulness of ICTs for educational purposes seems to be evident, and in language acquisition it is not an exception. ICTs promote the use of the language in real contexts, turning the language learning into meaningful knowledge for the student since they allow the use of

authentic materials (such as YouTube, online newspapers, blogs, among others) in the classroom.

In this regard, S.S.C Young (2003) affirms that

(The use of authentic materials) encourage collaborative writing [for example] for enhancing English as the second language writing development through increasing engagement, confidence and responsibility; fosters student empowerment to increase students' control of the content and process of their own learning; and ultimately promotes student motivation and interest in the functional use of the learned language and provides students with a less threatening means to communicate. (p.449)

Furthermore, Blurton (2002) suggests that the use of ICTs in FL classrooms promotes acquisition, since they work as an important facilitator in the understanding of the contents and the absorption of knowledge. The latter helps students acquire structures that will be useful to develop their ability to create written and spoken utterances. Thus, ICTs facilitate the language acquisition process by proving useful tools to develop students' language skills, and control their affective variables.

2.4.2.1 Learning styles.

One of the best characteristics of ICTs is that, because of their variety of tools, they can reach multiple learning styles within the foreign language classroom. Rita Dunn and Shirley Griggs (1988) define learning styles as “the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others” (p.3, as cited in Oxford, 2003). In this regard, students' affective variables could differ depending on the learner and the kind of task that he or she is being exposed. Emma Violand-Sanchez (1995) classifies learning styles into: Divergers for those who learn by feeling,

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assimilators for the ones who learn by watching and listening, convergers for the ones who learn by thinking, and accommodators for the ones who learn by doing. However, Rebecca Oxford (2003) classifies them into sensory learners, being those visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile learners, which are similar to the ones described by Violand-Sanchez (1995). She defines visual learners as those who require visual stimuli; auditory learners as those who learn through audio material; and kinesthetic-tactile learners as those who learn by doing, touching things and performing actions. The latter classification will be used in this research paper when referring to learning styles, since they are more commonly used.

2.4.2.2 Oral production.

ICTs are a helpful tool to enhance pronunciation in foreign language acquisition; in concordance with Sonia Jurich (2001), the use of videos and songs in EFL lessons help students join the sounds with words. She adds that “[a]lthough languages can be learned as an individual enterprise, fluency is developed only through the involvement of a group” (p.7), which can be provided by ICTs through chat rooms, and video conferences. In this regard, Swapna Kumar and Maija Tammelin (2008) state that

a motivating language learning opportunity using ICT is provided by chat rooms and virtual environments such as Second Life where the language learner can practice not only the written use of the language, but also practice speaking and pronunciation, without the fear of making mistakes. (p.5)

Consequently, ICTs not only promote language acquisition, but also enhance language production by providing contextualized environments, motivating students through the use of authentic materials, and lowering students’ levels of anxiety when speaking.

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The current data shows that Chilean students do not have a good command in English language, which is notoriously reflected in their performance in diagnosed skills. It must be difficult for those students to make use of the oral form of the language, since it is considered to be one of the hardest skills to teach and train (Coombe *et al.*, 2007). However, it's absolutely necessary to develop speaking skills as they are essential to communicate and they actually show if students would be able to use the language in real contexts. For those reasons, to include new methodologies to encourage students to speak in English is absolutely necessary. In that regard, alternative assessment appears to be a good option as, by using this type of evaluation, assessing and developing tasks become more contextualized and authentic. Besides, ICTs seem to be an appropriate and effective choice as they motivate, reach learning styles, enhance the attitude towards the target language and the culture, and lower the levels of anxiety through their tools, which are more familiar for students.

3. Chapter III: Discussion

3.1 Assessment Practices in Chile and use of Technology

The diagnostic tests applied in Chile in 2004, 2008, and 2010 have evidenced the low level of proficiency in the English language. However, the type of assessment used to measure the English skills can be questioned, same as these results. The main reason is that proficiency tests were used as diagnostic tests, so there was a mismatch between the assessment tool and the objectives of the Government (Sheehan, personal communication, 2011). Standardized tests usually are not contextualized (Brown, 2004), so testees may have difficulties to answer the questions because they might lack of the background to do it. In other words, it is possible that Chilean students' performance in these tests did not reflect their real competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Therefore, it is evident that the principles of assessment posed by Brown (2004) were not met.

3.1.1 Standardized tests in Chile and the principles of assessment.

With regard to the principles of assessment, it is essential to mention that there are multiple factors that might affect these principles in general (Brown, 2004). These factors may have some effects on student's and teachers' performance, meaning that students' results and scores do not reflect a hundred percent what students can or cannot do in a language, on the one hand; and teachers' grading system is not completely fair, thus having an impact on students' lives. Therefore, all kinds of measurement must fulfill the five principles of assessment (*ibid*) in order to be a feasible way of evaluating students' performance in the language.

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With regards to the principles of practicality, validity and reliability, standardized tests seem to fulfill the first principle, while the others are poorly achieved according to our findings in the literature review. Standardized examinations tend to be practical, as they have a specific scoring/evaluation, and they are time efficient – since most standardized examinations include multiple choice questions which are easy to correct, – which compromises objectiveness in terms of score results (Brown, 2004). However, this principle is at stake if prices are considered: International Examinations are rather costly (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.) and, therefore, not everybody can afford them.

In order for any test to be valid, it needs to measure the same contents that were taught in class (content-validity) and through the same methods (construct-validity). If we take speaking as an example, it should be assessed in the same way that it was taught in the EFL classrooms in Chile. Nevertheless, in general, based on the literature, we believe that standardized tests – as well as traditional tests – cannot completely reflect what learners of foreign languages can really do with the language, because they ask testees to communicate, and traditional teaching methodologies – such the Grammar-Translation and the Audiolingual Methods – do not teach students how to speak, but only to master grammar structures. If we bring this assumption down to the Chilean students, we have already seen that tests yield poor results, probably because of a lack of validity.

Reliability, however, seems to be met, since rater-reliability, test reliability and test-administration reliability are generally met. However, In Chile, at least, results from these tests do not seem to be completely reliable, since students' emotional variables (student-related reliability) can affect their performance if they do not feel comfortable, because they have to use the language in unnatural contexts, which can be rather stressing (Ur, 1991).

We can also add that the standardized tests applied in Chile lack authenticity. Tests are supposed to make students use the language in meaningful, real and motivating contexts; however, standardized tests create an atmosphere which becomes unnatural, and sometimes stressful, especially if results are going to affect the school's or even the country's reputation (Ur, 1991; Brown, 2004). Authenticity is not only essential for gathering more reliable evidence, but also because it helps to lower anxiety, and also boost motivation and attitudes that students might experience towards the target language because they are being assessed (Richard-Amato, 2003).

Practicality, reliability, and authenticity are directly related to washback, since if results are low, because the former principles are not met, they have a negative impact on students, teachers, school administrations, and even governments, which is exactly what has happened in Chile.

Now, we are aware that the application of standardized tests is not a common practice in the EFL classrooms in Chile. However, it is known that teachers in Chile stick to traditional ways to assess language competence (Arcos, 2012), taking standardized tests as models. That is, classroom testing tends to go against some of the principles of assessment. Besides, teachers usually test receptive skills only, again. Thus, how can be productive skills developed and assessed in an authentic environment, in and in a practical and valid way, so that assessment yields reliable results that contribute to a positive washback.

In order to focus the process of assessment on helping students to learn from evaluation rather than hindering the real use of the language, we believe that an alternative form of assessment needs to be used. According to McNamara (2000), alternative assessment allows students to become aware of the process of learning and motivates them to continue learning as they feel more responsible for their achievements and goals when studying content by themselves.

3.1.2 Alternative assessment.

Alternative assessment may become a solution to measure learners' progress and achievements in the language effectively, since it provides learners with opportunities to make real use of the target language – in this case, English – for an actual purpose: Communication. Learners can demonstrate what they have actually learned and how well they can use what they have learned (Opp-Beckman & Klinghammer, 2006). Moreover, alternative assessment helps students become aware of their own achievements through the use of one of the types of authentic evaluation, self-assessment (McNamara, 2000). In relation to self-assessment Heidi Andrade and Ying Du state

Self-assessment is a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on and evaluate the quality of their work and their learning, judge the degree to which they reflect explicitly stated goals or criteria, identify strengths and weaknesses in their work, and revise accordingly. (2007, p.160)

Thence, alternative assessment might be an option which is able to improve the weaknesses of the standardized tests by giving a communicative and natural approach to the English lessons, which results in using the language naturally and to communicate a message.

3.1.3 Use of ICTs by Chilean teenagers.

One of the shapes that alternative assessment has taken is ICTs, which can be considered performance-based assessment because it can evaluate students' productive skills in simulated/real contexts (Brown, 2004). ICTs are being used worldwide and with more and more frequency in educational settings, and Chile is no exception. Regarding the use of ICTs as tools for foreign language

learning/acquisition, the Chilean government has created some projects, software, and websites, such as the English Opens Doors, It's my Turn, and Mingoville, respectively, in an attempt to help to improve the level of English in the country. However, not only are ICTs commonly used in educational environments, but they are also being used in everyday life, especially by young people. Teenagers and young adults have found a way to communicate and express their opinions by using the internet; for example, through social networks. An article published by a Chilean newspaper stated that "a 70% of Chilean young people prefer to spend their time on the internet instead of doing any other kind of activity" (EMOL, 2011). This reality shows that the internet has swelled the increasing number of people engaged in the use of Information Communication Technologies.

3.1.3.1 Use of social networks.

According to an article published by *Qué pasa* (2012), a Chilean magazine, "the social demonstrations held during 2011 set up the use of the social networks as a useful tool for coordinating different events, and expressing opinions" (Scherman & Arriagada, 2012). Hence, the demonstrations held over the past few years have helped to increase the massive incorporation of young people in the ICTs' world, through the use of Facebook and Twitter as a means to express their opinions and state their complaints against the social issues taking place in the national reality. Furthermore, *La Tercera* newspaper published an article which was titled "Chile is the third country around the world that spends more time on social networks" (Christiansen, 2011); this assumption was based on the results presented by the website comScore, and it shows the tendency to the use of the internet (*ibid*) by Chilean people from 15 to 24 years old.

3.1.3.2 Use of ICTs for videos, chat, and entertainment.

Although the use of social networks is the most popular among Chilean young people, there is a significant number of individuals who use internet for other purposes. YouTube is probably the most famous platform to watch videos on the internet, a 56% of the national population has access to YouTube daily, and this number increases everyday (EMOL, 2010). Furthermore, there are a considerable number of people that spend more than 7, 6 hours a day using Netflix or Hulu (Christiansen, 2011). In addition, the use of chat rooms and software for chatting such as Messenger, Skype, and Yahoo messenger appear to have a big number of users in Chile (EMOL, 2010) which means that technological devices and internet seem to be part of young people's life.

Consequently, Chilean young people, especially teenagers and young adults, are familiarized with ICTs, not only in educational contexts, but also in their daily routine. Héctor Rival (2010), professor of the Universidad Católica del Maule, posed that “the use of ICTs in education is a useful and powerful tool that democratizes and offers equal opportunities to people from different social class” (p.1). In order to take advantage of young people's interest in ICTs, it might be a good idea to use them as an alternative way to assess students' performance as ICTs are part of learners' reality. This assumption is based on the fact that “alternative assessment procedures are based upon a constructivist principle of knowledge construction. Fundamental focus of such procedures lies in the learner's ability for creative expression and proficiency in real life task and activities” (Senapaty, 2010, p.39); in that regard ICTs seem to be an alternative, innovative and authentic way to appraise students' performance. In addition, ICTs counts with several tools that could be useful to create tasks to assess speech production in real contexts.

3.2 Benefits of ICTs

There are a number of factor that can make ICTs beneficial for foreign language teaching and learning. For example, ICTs provide an excellent opportunity to develop oral skills, since there is a variety of tools that can be helpful for students to join sounds with words, for instance, as well as to promote interaction in meaningful and original contexts, thus providing opportunities for students to use the language in order to communicate (Kumar & Tammelin, 2008).

Regarding assessment, ICTs also allow assessing students' oral performance without necessarily requiring the teacher and the student to be in the same place and time (Tinio, 2002), which could help to lower the high levels of test anxiety usually experienced during oral examinations —as it has been previously stated. This idea will be developed later on.

3.2.1 Benefits of ICTs for learning styles.

ICTs not only help develop and assess productive skills, but they can also address different kinds of learning styles as the offer a variety of tools to cover the necessities of different kinds of learners in foreign language contexts: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic stimuli. As Oxford (2003) emphasises, there are different kinds of learning styles in every classroom, and it is essential to address them all when trying to promote foreign language acquisition. ICTs also help pupils to feel more comfortable during English lessons because, by lowering their affective filters with activities in which they feel more comfortable, they can also develop their creativity in accordance to their own learning style.

3.2.1.1 Visual learners.

According to Oxford (2003), visual learners learn by watching, that is to say, through visual stimuli. As a result, they accept and feel more comfortable with those tasks that include images, and videos, or objects they can see and associate with their meanings. For example, if they hear and see a bottle at the same time, they can associate the image and its meaning. As Jurich (2001) emphasizes “the use of pictures provides individual students with a tool to connect the new word to a known meaning, thus facilitating understanding and memorization” (p.7). ICTs provide tools for visual learners that could be used in oral presentations or for oral presentations such as PowerPoint games, videos, blogs, online games, movies, just to name some of them. Thus, ICTs meet visual learners’ needs, and provide the opportunity to use their innate learning preference during English lessons.

3.2.1.2 Auditory learners.

Oxford (2003) has defined auditory learners as those who learn by listening, without requiring visual input. They enjoy conversations and storytelling, although they may have problems developing written tasks. When incorporating ICTs in foreign language classrooms, auditory learners can have multiple opportunities to develop their oral skills. This can include songs, video websites, Skype, radio programs, audio books, phone calls, among many others. Consequently, ICTs might facilitate the teacher’s task of promoting language acquisition and skill development for auditory learners when using them in foreign language lessons.

3.2.1.3 *Kinesthetic learners*

Although kinesthetic learners seem to be harder to reach through the use of ICTs, the truth is that they count with several tools to reach kinesthetic learners' necessities. Oxford (2003) describes kinesthetic learners as those who learn by doing, through body movement, and immediate action. They enjoy activities that include movement such as role-plays, and outdoor games. Some of the tools that ICTs offer for reaching kinesthetic learners are Wii, Play Station 3, Ultrastar Karaoke, songs that include dancing, among others. All of them are truly entertaining, motivating, authentic materials, useful to reach kinesthetic learners.

3.2.2 Benefits of ICTs for the affective filter.

The affective variables that a student may experience during foreign language lessons, specifically during oral performances in foreign language classrooms, have an impact on the quality of the final performance (Krashen, 1982). There are multiple factors that have an effect on the quality of the oral performance, such as teacher-student relationship, willingness to communicate using the foreign language, and others such as motivation and anxiety (*ibid*). The use of ICTs to promote the spoken use of the foreign language could be helpful to break down the barriers imposed by those affective variables. In relation to that, it must be mentioned that in a technological society,

it is essential to train English language students to the use of Information and Communication Technologies to enhance and motivate their learning, and at the same time to improve their performance in the functional use of English at a communication level. (Rodriguez, 2007, p.167)

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Moreover, ICT tools provide motivating and contextualize opportunities for students to practice speaking within a safety zone where they do not fear to sound ridiculous or to make mistakes (Kumar & Tammelin, 2008).

The previous statements confirm the importance of using ICTs to develop speaking skills. It seems that ICTs can help to lower students' affective filter, as they provide comfortable and familiar environments where learners can speak freely, without being afraid of not using the correct structures.

3.2.2.1 Attitudes.

James Lantolf (2000) states that there are several factors that could affect students' attitude when learning a foreign language, as it can be influenced by internal and external agents. Furthermore, he adds that "the degree of interaction and involvement in the shared activity depends on learners' motives, beliefs, and attitudes and their investment in the learning situation" (p.80), which could affect significantly the final result of the performance. Through the use of ICTs not only do students realize of the importance of speaking English in today's world, but they also feel more interested in the foreign culture of the language as they are being directly exposed to it, which is called acculturation (Richard-Amato, 2003). In that regard, ICTs shorten the distance imposed by geographical barriers between one culture and another, facilitating the rapprochement of them (which may be reflected in students' attitude during foreign language lessons).

3.2.2.2 Motivation.

It is evident that most ICT tools are interesting for students, making them feel motivated towards completing the tasks in foreign language lessons. Don Passey, Colin Rogers, Joan

Machell and Gilly McHugh (2004) state that several researchers have concluded that there are multiple “enhanced attainments that uses of ICT can bring to schools and to pupils, and a part of this was the recognition of motivational effect [*sic*]” (p.11). In this regard, the authors have divided those motivational effects into two:

- Situational interest: In which elements of the situation grab the interest of participants. To some degree, the interest remains dependent upon the continuing situational influence (which is related to instrumental motivation).
- Personal interest: In which a disposition on the part of the individual to pursue the activity in question is assumed (*ibid*, p.12) —which is related to integrative motivation—.

Consequently, ICTs catch students’ attention, which facilitates the retention of the contents and the use of the spoken language, and, at the same time, students can link their own interests to the expected learning outcomes.

3.2.2.3 Anxiety.

On the one hand, anxiety may be one of the factors that affect the quality of the oral performance with more intensity. This assumption is based on that speakers are exposed to high levels of tension as on the majority of the occasions they do not feel comfortable using the foreign language, which is called foreign language anxiety (Yu-ching & Wu, 2004). On the other hand, Tinio (2002) poses that ICTs offer the opportunity to interact with people through the use of chats, videogames, xbox, and video conferences. The benefits that ICTs provide to the foreign language in the oral form could possibly help to break down the barrier imposed by affective variables such as anxiety, as students do not necessarily need to see (be in front of) their examiner (Kumar & Tammelin, 2008).

To sum up, ICTs offer great opportunities for students lower their affective filter, thus dealing with motivation, attitude and anxiety in the right way. Now, what are the benefits that ICTs offer in the field of assessment?

3.2.3 Benefits of ICTs for assessment.

ICTs have been classified as an alternative way to assess student's performance (Senapaty, 2010), because they provide certain benefits to the assessment of oral production. One of the advantages of using ICTs to assess oral performance is that they give opportunities for students to use the language in meaningful and contextualized situations, which fulfills the principle of authenticity (Brown, 2004; Bachman, 1990). For instance, students can use the language to communicate with people all around the world through computers and the internet. In relation to that, students can use the foreign language to communicate a message, and to understand other people's speech even if they and their speaking partners do not speak the same language. English then turns into a common code between both speakers, and students are "forced" to use the foreign language to make interactions —but in a contextualized situation. When the assessment is contextualized "learners therefore learn as they do and, whenever appropriate, work on real-life problems in-depth, making learning less abstract and more relevant to the learner's life situation" (Tinio, 2002, p.9).

Another benefit of using ICTs to assess oral performance is that it can provide a more "objective" perspective towards students (Christianson & Hoskins, Watanabe, 2009). For example, when using video or tape recordings, the teacher can have the opportunity to listen or watch the performance as many times as he/she needs in order to assess it, focusing only on the student that is being assessed. Additionally, students can take a look at their own performance,

accept and correct their own language mistakes, and be aware of their own progress (*ibid*), which leads to give positive washback to students. In addition, it is important to mention that delivering tasks through the use of ICTs is a process, which must be continued and consistent in order to make the assessment valid. Finally, ICTs also fulfill the principle of practicability due to the fact that they are everywhere and that technological gadgets can be used anywhere by the teacher and the student. In a nutshell, ICTs are an alternative for of assessment that can fulfill the principles of assessment.

3.3 ICTs and its Tools for Oral Production

There are numerous facilities that ICTs offer to develop tasks for different kinds of speakers in concordance with Brown's model of speaking performance (2004). He proposes five categories to classify students depending on their command of the foreign language: Imitative, intensive, responsive, interactive, and extensive. This classification goes from the beginner level to the advanced one, and each of them is joined to a certain kind of task, which could be more appropriate for the students' levels in order to make a task challenging for them — but not impossible to accomplish. The kind of task to develop the speaking skill will also depend on what the teacher wants their students to work on; for instance, at imitative level, the teacher will plan tasks in which his/her students should only repeat, in order to work more with pronunciation, stress, and intonation (micro-skills) rather than with macro-skills (*ibid*). Therefore, as ICTs offer multiple tools in e-learning or b-learning contexts, several of them could be helpful to work on the development of the speaking skill at different levels.

3.3.1 E-learning.

E-learning is a concept that involves the incorporation of electronic and technological devices in educational contexts (Manochehr, 2006). In foreign language classrooms, the inclusion

of technology plays an important role at the moment of contextualizing the contents of the lessons, which is something essential if teachers want to promote foreign language acquisition instead of only language teaching (Johnson, 2008). Throughout the following paragraphs some ICTs tools related to e-learning education will be briefly described in order to give a sample on how technology can be used to assess oral performance in foreign language contexts.

3.3.1.1 Skype.

Skype is a tool for interaction among people that has been gaining more followers throughout the years. Regarding foreign language teaching and learning, “Skype is an excellent tool to help teachers build skills using technology. It also happens to be an effective tool to teach languages as it incorporates high levels of verbal interaction between users” (Eaton, 2010, p.8). Thus, the benefits that ICTs have towards oral production are meaningful for enhancing the quality of the oral performance. The service that Skype offers allows teachers to create virtual classrooms where they can be in contact with their students from different places. Furthermore, Skype also provides facilities for teachers to interact with their peers and find classes which share similar characteristics, and use the Skype service as a platform for language exchange (Skype team, 2012).

- *Advantages of Skype.*

As it has been previously stated there are certain services rendered by Skype that could be useful to assess students’ oral performance, such as the following (Skype team, 2012):

- a) Video call: Skype offers a totally free video chatting service, which can be shared by four users at the same time. The teacher can use this application of Skype in order to guide a lesson, or to make short interviews to his/her students and make them interact using the foreign language.

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- b) Calls: The call service offered by Skype gives multiple opportunities for the students to practice their speaking skills without the fear of making mistakes. Skype calls can be shared by six people at the same time, and since this call does not need to include the living image of the people who are speaking, students can feel more comfortable because they are not being observed. The teacher could join those hangouts as a mere listener without interfering in students' conversation. Alternatively, he/she could be an active participant in the conversation; it all depends on which micro and macro-skills he/she is trying to assess.
- c) Skype-in-Education service: The Skype team is deeply conscious of the tools they provide for foreign language teaching. For this reason, they have created a special website (education.skype.com) where people all around the world gather to share their Skype experiences. This also works as a platform to find participants for language exchange at different levels and languages. The participants are usually teachers trying to find a classroom in some other part of the world to exchange their language with native speakers of the foreign language they are teaching.

Hence, using Skype as a tool to assess oral production through ICTs can be very beneficial for students and teachers, because it provides authentic and alternative ways to assess oral performance without debilitating the final result. The type of task, and its complexity, will depend on the student's level of English; for instance, if it is imitative, the student will probably have to repeat a couple of sentences through the call, but if it is extensive, then what the teacher will assess will be other aspects apart from pronunciation (Brown, 2004), such as, for example, strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

3.3.1.2 *YouTube.*

YouTube is the most famous platform to watch videos using the internet. The increasing number of users that YouTube has is because “the ease of watching and sharing videos, combined with the fact that the site is free, opens the experience of online video to a wide range of users” (Educase learning initiative, 2006). In educational contexts, “as a social-software application, YouTube is part of a trend among Net Generation students to replace passive learning with active participation, where everyone has a voice, and anyone can contribute” (*ibid*, p.2). Consequently it is a good idea to include YouTube in speaking tasks in order to assess oral performance since it has certain facilities that can help students to do better in speaking tasks.

- *Advantages of YouTube.*

YouTube, as an easy-to-use ICT tool, allows students to develop tasks that include the implementation of this instrument as a means to assess their performance. Students can record their oral presentations as many times as they need before uploading them to the website. This is something that could help significantly to lower the high levels of anxiety experienced during the oral performance, and it could help to enhance the quality of the oral presentation. Regarding this topic, Jeffery Gentry (2008) suggests that

students can simply upload their presentations to sites like YouTube so their instructor and classmates can view their presentations as they would in a regular classroom. This simple idea can close the potential gap in quality between traditional and online courses in oral performance. (p.2)

Thus, YouTube seems to be a feasible means to generate good opportunities for students to develop their speaking skill without fearing the reaction of the audience, or without fearing to make mistakes as they can record the performance as many times as they want. Hence, YouTube can be used for tasks created from imitative to extensive speakers (Brown 2004) as it can be used to assess pronunciation, fluency, intonation, domain of grammar structures, and public speaking skills, among others.

3.3.2 B-learning.

Regarding the speaking tasks (Brown, 2004), the use of ICTs, especially the b-learning methodologies, appear to be useful tools to practice oral abilities (British Council, 2006). B-learning can reinforce speaking tasks from the imitative to the extensive one through the use of computer programs, software or technological gadgets which have the features for students to use them and develop/practice speaking skills. Some of the methodologies previously mentioned might be a software called Pronunciation Power (Debbie Lee, 1996), which focuses on phonetics with the help of a native speaker; and also Video Recording, which is a tool that helps to prepare activities for tasks of varying difficulties. Both Pronunciation Power and Video Recording will be described in the following paragraphs in order to explain how they can help students to develop the different speaking tasks.

3.3.2.1 Pronunciation Power (PP)

This software focuses on pronunciation and consists of two CD-ROMs: PP1, which addresses beginner-intermediate learners, and PP2 for intermediate-advanced learners. Regarding its functioning, Pronunciation Power has among its features: A sound menu, speech analyses, lessons, and exercises (Peterson, 1999). In the sound menu, there are 52 phonemes which can be reproduced by clicking on phonetic symbols (see Figure 1 below).

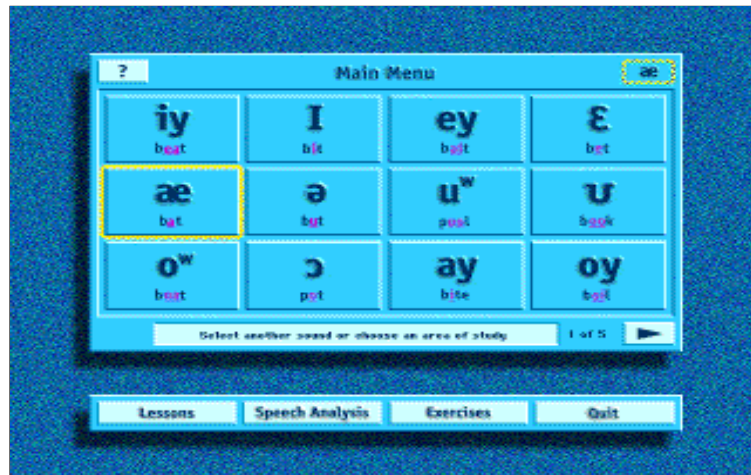


Figure 1: Phonetic Symbols (Peterson, 1999)

Then, in the speech analysis application, learners record themselves in order to try to match their pronunciation with that of a native speaker (see below Figure 2).

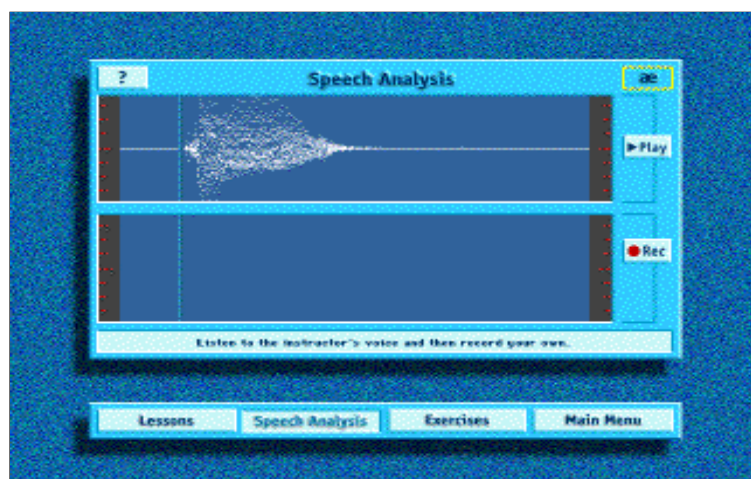


Figure 2: Native speaker sound wave (Peterson, 1999)

In the lessons section, students, through a QuickTime animation, observe how the human articulatory system works to produce certain sounds (see below Figure 3).

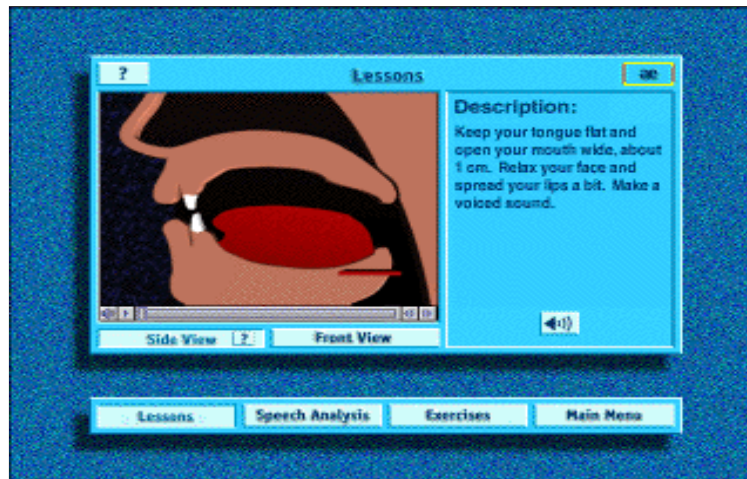


Figure 3: Human articulatory system

In the exercises part, learners can practice the pronunciation of single words and sentences comparing these with the native speakers' one and, at the same time, working on listening discrimination of words (as shown in Figure 4). All these activities are meant to reinforce the pronunciation from basic to more complex tasks.



Figure 4: Listening Discrimination (Peterson, 1999)

- *Advantages of Pronunciation Power.*

Pronunciation Power enhances the listening and speaking skills. The former is benefited because the program gives the learner comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) to understand and

then reproduce units of sounds. The latter, because this software helps the learner to comprehend how the micro-skills such as phonemes, morphemes, words, collocations, and phrasal units (Brown, 2004) should be pronounced and practiced. Besides, Pronunciation Power is a software program which can be easily used by students, as its instructions and animations are clear. The animations helps the learners feel more motivated and better understand how to pronounce the English vowels and consonants sounds by showing how the human articulatory system works.

3.1.2.2 Video Recording.

In recent years, video recording has become more popular as it can be used in several gadgets and it also provides benefits for the teaching process of a foreign language. Video Recording is a tool that is being used with more frequency among adolescents due to the fact that it has gained more popularity on websites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Besides, these days it is easy to have technological gadgets such as mobiles phones, smartphones, computers, and video cameras that have recording within its features. In the case of cell phones, there are approximately three billion of users in all parts of the world being considered the mobile learning device more predominant and the most favourite of mobile devices (Cui, G. & Wang, S., 2008). Thence, since they are so popular and have video recording within its features, mobiles phones allow students to use video recording with more frequency and for learning purposes as well.

- ***Advantages of Video Recording.***

Video recording provides learners and teachers with multiples benefits in relation to assessment, principles of assessment, students' role in education and the affective variables involved in learning and performance. With regard to assessment, teachers, due to the lack of

time, usually make quick and subjective judgments on students' oral performance, especially when they have to listen and evaluate, at the same time, group conversations. In this case, video recording offers the educator and learner to see the performance as many times as they want, allowing the teacher to assess more accurately and objectively. Furthermore, the fact that videos can be edited helps students to feel more secure and lower their levels of anxiety as they are not afraid of making mistakes or being judged. Besides, video recording allows students be able to assess themselves, feel more motivated in their own assessment and make improvements to achieve their goals (Christianson *et al.*, 2009). Then, in relation to the student's role in education, he/she becomes the principal facilitator of his/her own learning process as the student learns by doing and assesses his or herself. Regarding washback, Manuel Fernández (2011) states that video recording enables students to practice the speaking ability and reflect on what they have or have not achieved in the process of learning the language based on their performances. Thence, video recording for testing the speaking skill can enhance the process of assessment, create a comfortable atmosphere for students to lower their levels of anxiety, place the students as the centre of the education, and enable them to reflect on their performance.

3.4 Obstacles to Integrate ICTs in Education

As it has been mentioned before, there are multiples benefits when using ICTs for educational purposes but there are also some obstacles that teachers, schools and students may encounter, and in this manner they can impede the effective inclusion of ICTs in EFL lessons.

Some elements related to teachers can become an obstacle to implement ICTs in the classroom, as lack of competence, confidence and time. For example, if a teacher does not speak English adequately or is not familiar with ICTs, the latter may become an annoying reality more

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than a contribution to teaching. Then, if schools do not give adequate pedagogical and technical training to teachers for using ICTs in EFL lessons and students do not have access to technological devices for learning, again, ICTs are not efficient. Finally, with regard to students, the overuse or misuse of ICTs, without a previous effective technological instruction might impede taking advantage of the benefits that ICTs provide for learning.

In conclusion, in general terms, the use of ICTs is greatly beneficial for teaching and learning purposes; however, both students and teachers might have to face some barriers when ICTs are included in lessons. These obstacles can be divided into three: teacher-level, school-level, and student-level barriers. Despite the fact of having difficulties when using ICTs, the problems can be solved through technological and pedagogical training for teachers that might help them feel more confident when working with technology. Besides, the educational setting can provide technical support, ICT accessibility for each student and an adequate technological training for teachers which might be helpful for overcoming the school-level barriers. Finally, in order to face student-level barrier, the support of parents, school and teachers can result beneficial to guide students to know how to use ICTs effectively and understand the benefits of using them for learning purposes. Thence, although educators and students might experience some difficulties at the moment of using ICTs, there are always solutions which depend on the schools, students and teachers' willingness to overcome them and integrate ICTs for learning purposes. Besides, the Chilean state has shown to be concerned about the inclusion of ICTs in our classrooms, which is evidenced by the SEP law and its effects on education, to give an example.

3.5 Why to Use ICTs to Assess Oral Production?

To sum up, ICTs have appeared to be beneficial for different aspects of foreign language teaching when assessing oral production. First of all, ICTs fulfil the principles of assessment being, each of them, accomplished up to some degree; however, there will always be multiples steps to follow that will help teachers find the ways for improving assessment practices in terms of practicality, reliability, washback, authenticity, and validity. In addition, they can provide immediate feedback since “the computer can automatically calculate scores when learners are finished” (Namibia Training Authority, 2006), for example, in imitative tasks. Furthermore, the assessment becomes more personal and detailed as the teacher can take a look at learners’ process at an individual level, and he/she also has the opportunity to direct the assessment to a wide range of students, who have different learning necessities. Moreover, ICTs increase motivation, as the majority of them catch students’ attention, and, if used properly, they can lower the levels of anxiety during oral examinations which might enhance the quality of the performance.

Conclusions

The use of ICTs in the everyday life has become very popular worldwide as technology evolves and reaches every corner of 21-century people's life, and Chile is not the exception. One of those corners is education, where educators and students can use ICTs for teaching and learning, respectively. Having explored the benefits of the inclusion of technology as a means to assess oral performance in foreign language classrooms, it was found that ICTs might effectively have a positive impact on the assessment process of the speaking skill.

It was found that the use of ICTs as a means of assessment might enhance the quality of the oral performance as they help students lower communication anxiety, for example. This assumption relies on the fact that ICTs are familiar tools for learners and help them feel more comfortable at the moment of using the language in the spoken form. According to Krashen (2009), affective variables can affect considerably the oral output, impeding speech production or making it less effective. Additionally, ICTs provide the opportunity for students to use the foreign language within their comfort zone, thus increasing motivation and improving their attitude towards the foreign language. Thence, when students use ICTs for educative purposes (for example, when being assessed), they feel more secure, as technology has become part of their daily lives, and, in consequence, their performance may improve.

Furthermore, in regular oral examinations, the teacher must usually listen to different speakers while taking notes at the same time, which most of the times only provides a general or simple view of each student's performance. However, through the use of ICTs, the evaluation of the speaking skill can be more personalized and detailed. Assessment through ICTs becomes more elaborated, because the teacher has the possibility to directly interact with the student through interviews via calls, video-conferences or video-chats. Besides, the teacher can pay

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attention to every aspect that must be developed at the moment of speaking or delivering a speech —micro and macro skills (Brown, 2004) — such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and discourse management, among others, offering a more complete outlook of the use of the language. Consequently, using ICTs for oral production enables the educator have a more precise judgment on the learner's command in the language as students are exposed to comprehensive and individualized assessment practices that measure the abilities that must be covered in the speaking skill.

In addition, ICTs appear to be beneficial as they fulfill the principles of assessment up to a certain point. With regard to the principle of practicality, to assess the oral performance, ICTs might be practical as learners and educators can easily have access to technological devices, software, and applications and they do not necessarily have to be in the same place and time at the moment of developing and assessing the task (Tinio 2002). Furthermore, ICTs fulfill the principle of authenticity by providing contextualized learning through students' participation in forums, debates, chat rooms, interviews, and dialogs, giving meaning to learning the foreign language. The latter also illustrates the principles of validity and washback as students would be evaluated through the use of the same tools they were taught with, which might result in positive washback because to fulfill this principle “there should be little if any difference between activities involved in learning the language and activities involved in preparing for the test” (Messick, 1996,p.4). Finally, test reliability will depend on multiple factors, such as rater reliability, student reliability, test administration reliability, and test reliability. In relation to those aspects, ICTs might be reliable as students feel more confident when using technology, and teachers can use rubrics to make the assessment process more objective. So, ICTs might not meet a hundred percent the principles of assessment; however, they are still appropriate to assess the

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oral production as they have shown to be practical, reliable, authentic, and valid, and have a positive impact on the teaching/learning process.

Another advantage of using ICTs for oral production is that they offer a variety of tools that can be used to develop multiples types of speaking tasks and can reach different learning styles. By incorporating ICTs in his/her lessons, the teacher can plan diverse activities to promote oral abilities, from imitative to extensive; for instance, educators can use a software to teach phonetics, video calls for interviews or short dialogues, and video recording for monologues or sketches. Additionally, ICT tools offer the opportunity to reach different types of learners — visual, auditory, and kinesthetic— when assessing through the use of images, software, audio, and the internet. Thence, the teacher might prepare activities to address students' learning preferences and, in this manner, promote a positive attitude towards the task completion since, as Oxford (2003) states, learners feel more comfortable developing tasks that are related to their learning styles. Thence, ICTs provide educators with technological teaching material that benefits students performance as they can develop increasingly every ability or speaking task and make learners feel more comfortable being assessed according their own learning styles.

Referring back to the main problem —which sets the basis of the present research project— the results of standardized tests applied in 2004, 2008, and 2010 pointed out that the low level of proficiency of Chilean students in English receptive skills would not allow them to develop the productive ones (specifically the speaking skill). In addition, the type of test applied does not seem to be the most appropriate to the reality experienced by them in regular English lessons, as those examinations are not contextualized and do not promote interest in the language. In that regard, it was found that ICTs might help to solve the low command in English language by offering teachers and students more authentic and appropriate assessment practices. Using ICTs would promote the use of the language for the purpose of communication significantly,

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giving students the opportunity to speak in comfortable and real-life situations and providing more elaborated and varied types of assessment to the teacher.

Regarding the massive inclusion of ICTs in the Chilean education, reality shows that there is still a wide gap between the word and the action, as some teachers and schools that do have the facilities to include ICTs in foreign language lessons prefer to continue using the traditional method of the chalk and talk. For those reasons, we understand that, to implement the use of technology as a means of assessment for oral performances, there are several aspects that must be considered despite the benefits that ICTs provide to foreign language contexts. Those considerations involve material resources (including money), and special training for teachers to avoid the misuse/overuse of technology and to help them understand why the use ICTs is advisable. In order to deal with these possible difficulties that the implementation of ICTs as an educational tool might encounter, there should be a proper interest to face the obstacles as not only money and training are needed, but also real motivation from teachers to take the risk of including new technologies to promote meaningful learning.

Finally, it must be mentioned that due to the fact that all the information in this research paper was merely bibliographic, the real impact that ICTs can have on the assessment of oral production needs to be tested in Chilean classroom settings. In that regard, it would be a good idea to carry out a field study to evaluate the effects of some technological tools for assessing the spoken form of the language to verify if they can really benefit students' speaking skill. It is also necessary to evaluate the advantages and the disadvantages of the inclusion of ICTs to develop speaking tasks as there may be side effects as well; for example, the possible debilitation of the teacher-student relationship, multitasking (for instance, when a student is developing a task but at the same time uses the internet to do something that is not related to the task itself), and

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economic and time issues (ICTs might not be practical as there are some expensive and time-consuming technological tools).

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