



**TEACHING AND LEARNING OF AURAL AND ORAL SKILLS
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES:
THE PREPARATION OF BILINGUAL HOSTS FOR THE
CONFINTEA VI***

**Ensino-aprendizagem de Habilidades Orais em Línguas
Estrangeiras para Fins Específicos: Preparação de Anfitriões
Bilíngues para a CONFINTEA VI**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a FLSP¹ course where principles on the aural and oral development skills were addressed with the aim of preparing competent conference hosts to work for the CONFINTEA VI. The course takers were selected from two Public Brazilian Universities: The State University of Pará and The Federal University of Pará, by a process which involved previous needs assessment, course design, material selection and continuous collaborative teaching. Contextualized communicative strategies were used in order to facilitate interaction in the foreign languages with distinct groups of foreigners invited for the international event. The theoretical foundation of this paper lies principally on the works of Almeida Filho (1998), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Munby (1978) and Nunan (1988). This teaching experience is reported through a qualitative perspective and its positive results were accredited to the effective learning environment created for the development of multicultural linguistic knowledge.

Key-words: *FLSP; aural and oral skills; adult education; multicultural linguistic knowledge.*

* CONFINTEA (from the French “CONFérence INTernationale sur l’Education des Adultes”, which translates as “International Conference on Adult Education”) is the only truly global event focusing on adult education, making it a landmark event for UNESCO and the world community alike.

1. FLSP – Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes.





Resumo

Este artigo relata as experiências de um curso preparatório no qual os princípios de LEFE² foram abordados com o propósito de habilitar falantes bilíngues competentes para desempenhar o papel de anfitriões durante o evento CONFINTEA VI. Os participantes do curso, provenientes de duas Universidades Públicas Brasileiras: Universidade do Estado do Pará e Universidade Federal do Pará, foram selecionados por meio de um processo que envolveu avaliação das necessidades, desenho curricular, seleção de material e ensino colaborativo. Foram utilizadas diferentes estratégias de comunicação com o intuito de facilitar a interação com os convidados estrangeiros participantes do evento internacional. As bases teóricas deste trabalho residem principalmente nas obras de Almeida Filho (1998), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Munby (1978) e Nunan (1988). Esta experiência de ensino é relatada através de uma perspectiva qualitativa e seus resultados positivos foram atribuídos à aprendizagem eficaz cultivada em um ambiente criado para o desenvolvimento de conhecimentos linguísticos multiculturais.

Palavras-chave: *LEFE; habilidade oral; educação de adultos; conhecimento linguístico multicultural.*

1. Introduction

The origins of ESP date back to the 1940's [when they were developed] to meet the demands of an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). It was a time when English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, which in turn created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language. However, it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that research into the nature of particular varieties of English expanded. The Brazilian ESP Project started in

2. LEFE – Línguas Estrangeiras para Fins Específicos.





the 1980s due to “the need to create a center of expertise equipped to give advice on the organization and implementation of ESP courses in Brazilian Universities” (Celani et al., 1988). Since then, a lot of emphasis has been given to the teaching of reading skills in ESP courses, which is completely understood if we consider that reading is the most required and needed skill in our country, for school and academic purposes. Nevertheless, this paper aims at reporting an experience in Teaching Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes (TFLSP) at a project developed by the State University of Pará (UEPA), in partnership with the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), the State Department of Education (SEDUC), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The main objective was to train undergraduate students of both public universities, as well as public school language teachers, so that they would be able to develop aural and oral communicative abilities to welcome and assist national delegations at the sixth International Conference on Adult Education CONFINTEA VI, held in December 2009, in the capital city of the state of Pará, in Brazil.

The news of the CONFINTEA VI being held in the city of Belém was the starting point for a great mobilization in several sectors of our society, particularly in education. By drawing attention to the ways in which adult learning and education (ALE) relate and contribute to sustainable development in all its facets – social, economic, ecological and cultural – the essentially educational and political event, aimed to shed light on the issues of adult learning and non-formal education all over the world.

The conference, hosted by the Government of Brazil, united around 2,000 participants, including several Heads of State, more than 50 ministers, experts, representatives of civil society organizations, private providers and practitioners from around the world.

While the UNESCO member states, the Brazilian government, United Nations agencies, multi and bi-lateral cooperation agencies, organizations from civil society and private sectors made arrangements for the international event to take place, a parallel agenda had to be managed by two Public Universities: UEPA and UFPA, in Belém, in order to offer hosting support for the visitors. Preparing conference hosts



to CONFINTEA VI not only included gathering a team of competent speakers of foreign language to guide the visitors around the city -- there was a lot more involved in the project. Specific needs had to be fulfilled within the four months leading up to the event. It was necessary that competent communicators be prepared in all senses, but mainly, they were expected to master listening and speaking and to be able to employ sociolinguistic abilities in playing their roles at the conference.

Hence, in addition to sharing some ideas on how learners can develop and improve listening and speaking skills as well as on how foreign language professors can guide students' learning, we aim to present this paper by primarily discussing the importance of mastering foreign languages for international communication. Next, we concentrate on the needs analysis and the design of a language course for the CONFINTEA VI. Following that, we present the course development and its evaluation. Finally, we conclude with our reflections on the aspects that involved all the phases of the project, and the feedback given by its participants.

2. Languages for international communication

The official languages of the United Nations are English, French, Russian, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic, and as CONFINTEA is supported by UNESCO, these were also the official languages used in the conference. When contacted by the organizers of CONFINTEA VI in Brazil, we were requested to develop students' communicative competence in three of the six official languages of the event: English, French and Spanish, placing greater emphasis on listening and speaking skills. As in any ESP or FLSP course, the group selected had to share a common reason for learning / practicing these languages during the classes, and at the end of the project they would have to master content knowledge of the subject area and well-developed learning strategies.

Teaching languages for the purpose of communicating means, among many other things, overcoming barriers for effective interaction and regarding learners as individuals, so it is expected that teachers should also embrace the development of a communicative curriculum, with emphasis on cultural and sociolinguistic issues, going beyond



grammatical or linguistic competence and having fluency and accuracy as complementary principles.

In this sense Almeida Filho (1998: 36) affirms

“the communicative language teaching is that which organizes learning experiences in terms of relevant activities/ tasks of real interest and/or needs for the student so that he/she becomes a competent user of the target language for the purpose of genuine interactions with other speakers – users of such language”³⁴

With regard to the Foreign Language Teaching context and the increasing trend towards the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) also referred as Communicative Approach - Brown (1994) draws attention to the importance of authentic communication, generating unrehearsed language performance out of the classroom, developing linguistic fluency and facilitating lifelong language learning. For this reason, qualifying students to perform as conference hosts during the CONFINTEA VI posed a challenge to organizers. The course participants should be prepared to use the foreign languages effectively, out of the classroom context, and for professional purposes, mainly by means of listening and speaking, with visitors from a diversified range of cultural backgrounds in a myriad of different situations.

Conference hosts were, therefore, required to undergo a course designed with specific features, that is, a program capable of empowering them to manage situations creatively in the scope of an international conference event. Introducing themselves and others, learning about dress codes, geographic and historical aspects of the city, giving directions, providing all sort of touristic information -- hotel facilities, prices, restaurants, entertainment options, providing help in hospitals, airport and transportation, were among the topics focused on in the course curriculum; thus, conferring functions and contextualized

3. In the original: “O ensino comunicativo é aquele que organiza as experiências de aprender em termos de atividades relevantes/tarefas de real interesse e/ou necessidade do aluno para que ele se capacite a usar a língua-alvo para realizar ações de verdade na interação com outros falantes-usuários dessa língua” (Almeida Filho, 1998: 36)

4. The translations of the citations should be considered our responsibility.





situations a paramount importance. Besides the functional dimension required by the program, the conference hosts preparation course was even more comprehensive as it covered the history of the CONFINTEAs and UNESCO, educational politics, inclusive education, literacy, and cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. These broader topics proved to be a relevant background for the students' awareness of the competency they were expected to develop.

Modeling language and lexical choices were also important aspects of the course design. From the standpoint of the adopted communicative approach, being competent includes not only producing enunciations which are linguistically correct, but also socially suitable for the context and for the ones involved. All these frameworks were used as blueprints to develop a previous analysis for the course design which followed some necessary procedures.

3. The needs analysis and the design of a language course

Nunan (1988) asserts that the first concern in conducting a needs analysis is to determine what data needs to be collected, when it should be collected, by whom, through what means and for what purpose or purposes. Accordingly, during an interview which essentially guided the needs analysis, we adopted the model proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), as demonstrated in the figure below:

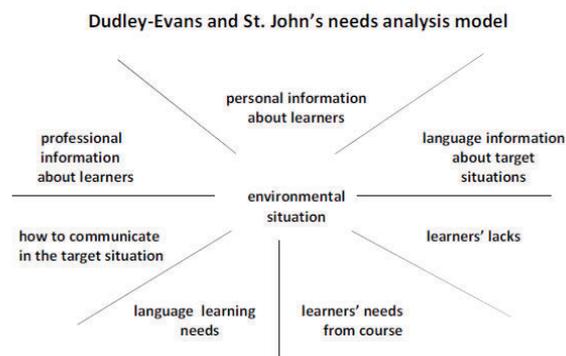


Figure 1 (Source: Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998: 125)





In the current educational experience, not only the course participants themselves, but also the visitors of the CONFINTEA VI were taken into account for the selection of topics and course content. The needs of the former were directly assessed during an interview for the students' selection. The course coordinator was as interested in evaluating the previous knowledge in the foreign languages: English, Spanish and French, presented by the 420 applicants, as in the teaching goals, selection of professors, materials and methodology.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (*op.cit.*) maintain that a Language for Specific Purpose program should fulfill learners' detected needs; use methods and strategies which are compatible with the specific purpose; concentrate on: grammar, lexicon, and registers; and devote attention to competences, discourse and gender that are consistent with the courses goal. Such items were observed throughout the interview.

It is important to note that the interview demanded, as prerequisite, fluency at level B2 considering the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, put together by the Council of Europe. The framework establishes the competence of a learner at this level as follows:

[...] "can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. [...] can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options."⁵

Although most of the selected hosts showed competency in the foreign language required for the level B2 fluency category, they did not share the same general background knowledge as they belonged to diversified academic areas/schools, varying from Arts, Languages, Business, Education, Natural and Social Sciences, Law, Medicine, at undergraduate and graduate levels. Nevertheless, they had the same

5. available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre_en.asp.





purposes in learning, according to Harding (2007): to achieve something specific beyond the language itself, to learn and understand specialized vocabulary and documentation, to have an identifiable working environment, to interact with the same specific public, to work with other team members, and to evaluate their own performance.

Another relevant aspect of this course design was the analysis of the target situation ahead: The International Conference on Adult Education to take place at the Hangar – Convention Center, in Belém – and all the implications which came along in terms of communication and providing highly qualified assistance to the invited chiefs of state.

Chambers (1980: 29) first used the term “Target Situation Analysis” (TSA) to indicate “communication in the target situation”. For Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 59), the analysis of the target situation needs “in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of various participants in the learning process”, but it was the Munbian Needs Analysis Model, summarized in the table that follows, which guided our steps into designing this course. Considering our context of Foreign Language Teaching, it proved efficient for our purposes.

<i>Munbian Needs Analysis Model</i>	
1. Why is Language needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For study; • For work; • For training; • For a combination of these; • For some other purposes, e.g. status, examination, promotion. 	<i>cf. Munbian purposive domain</i>
2. How will the language be used? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium: speaking, writing, reading, etc.; • Channel: e.g. telephone, face to face; • Types of text or discourse: e.g. academic text, lectures, catalogues, etc. 	<i>cf. Munbian instrumentality</i>
3. What will the content areas be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjects: e.g. medicine, biology, commerce, shipping, etc. • Level: technician, craftsman, postgraduate, etc. 	<i>cf. Munbian Communicative event</i>



<p>4. Where will the language be used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical setting: e.g. office, lecture theater, hotel, workshop, library; • Human context: alone, meetings, demonstrations, on telephone; • Linguistic context: e.g. in own country, abroad. 	<p><i>cf.</i> Munbian Setting (physical and psychological)</p>
<p>5. When will the language be used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concurrently with the ESP course or subsequently; • Frequently, seldom, in small amounts, in large chunks. 	

Table 1: (Source: Munby, 1978: 32)

Based on the items stated in Table 1, the 210 students selected, after the interviewing process, were told they would have face-to-face interactions, in all spaces involved, and might need language for a situation which demanded, basically, an effective training on touristic aspects and professional hosting. Although the content area would be education, they would also need to be prepared to guide and give directions around the convention center and the city, as well as to use trivial language and knowledge related to public relations at airports, hotels, shuttle buses or vans, theaters, food courts, ER or hospitals, museums, and all the places where the group of conference participants demanded assistance. Due to the public nature of the conference, the students also became aware of specific ways of addressing people politely and formally.

We observed high enthusiasm and motivation on students' part mainly because they were not being prepared to use language in a hypothetical situation, but in real-life. Besides, as the conference was not open to participants in general, they would be privileged in being among the most important authorities on adult education in the world. Another important motivational factor was that students received grants paid by the State Government.



4. Course development and evaluation

At first, the course was designed to cover 60 hours. Classes effectively started in March 2009, as the conference was supposed to take place in May 2009. However, due to the spread of Influenza H1N1 around the world, and for security reasons, the Government decided to postpone it until December 2009. For this reason, necessary changes to the original planning ensued and a 40-hour complement was added to the course in the second semester. The number of participants in both phases of the course is stated in the Table 2 below:

Course Participants	1 st phase	2 nd phase
English Students	87	87
Spanish Students	62	59
French Students	47	42
English Professors	04	02
Spanish Professors	03	02
French Professors	02	01
Pedagogical Supervisors	02	01
Coordinators	02	01
Assistants	03	01
Number of groups	09	05
Total number of students	196	188

Table 2: (Source: UEPA data, 2009)

In both phases, classes were held on Saturday mornings, from 8:00 to 12:00. During the week, students also had a number of homework assignments. To develop the course syllabus, the following Benchmarks adapted from ELDC⁶ standards for English oral communication for Public Relations (PR) were prioritized.

There were also lectures given by experts from UNESCO in the three languages. Every month the UNESCO staff, in charge of the organization of the event, traveled to Belém for meetings with the six work teams of the conference (ceremonial, logistics, communication,

6. English Language Development Center, available at: www.esp-world.info.





culture, security, universities). The representatives of both universities, as well as the professors in charge of the course, took part in some of these meetings, so that they could obtain guidance to pass on to the students. Those meetings unveiled a number of other pedagogical possibilities to implement in the course curriculum. A good illustration of this was the search for new videos and materials about security at airports, violence and precautions, as well as international etiquette. Instructors also searched for materials that illustrated techniques on how to give oral instructions and interact socially with foreigners in formal situations.

Although the conference hosts would not be in charge of seminars during the target event, it was a good opportunity for them to become familiar with the genre. They certainly profited a lot in improving their Standard English through oral presentations about relevant topics of the course syllabus and others which were not initially planned. It is worthwhile to mention that these topics evolved throughout the course in a process syllabus basis and were developed autonomously by all the participants, as they got more and more involved and motivated.

According to Harding (2007), evaluation and review are important parts of the world of work. Testing, whether it is learner assessment or course evaluation, is a central and integrated component of ESP teaching. Formal testing was not used in the preparation course; however, it was necessary to assess the learners' progress and also to identify how much of our teaching object turned into real learning. Therefore, professors continuously took notes of the students' needs, gave positive feedback about their strengths and also encouraged learners to become aware of what they lacked and how to work to overcome the challenges to come. To evaluate the effectiveness of the course, both quantitatively and qualitatively, surveys were used, during and after its implementation. Professors asked for students' feedback at the end of each class and shared their impressions with their co-workers in further meetings. A questionnaire was also applied at the end of the course. In order to assure transparency of purposes, and results and to be sure that all the students would be able to express themselves openly and freely, the questionnaire was elaborated in Portuguese, and students did not need to sign them, or provide any sort of identification, as evidenced below:



*Final Assessment Questionnaire***Caro(a) aluno(a),**

Chegamos ao final do nosso curso. Como última tarefa, gostaríamos que você preenchesse o questionário de avaliação, a seguir. O propósito é obter informações sobre o desempenho do corpo docente e discente e do corpo técnico, bem como saber se os objetivos propostos foram alcançados. Sua colaboração é, portanto, fundamental. "Acreditamos que nossa função, como educadores, é conduzir os alunos ao conhecimento, à descoberta de novos mundos, ao comprometimento com seu próprio aprendizado e ao crescimento pessoal e profissional"(Fernandes, 2006). O aprendiz, por sua vez, deve ter consciência de que o professor pode ajudá-lo nessa nova descoberta, mas "o processo de aprendizagem depende, em grande parte, de um engajamento individual – é um caminho pessoal guiado por vontades e necessidades próprias, cheio de descobertas provocadas por ações e reflexões pessoais." (Soares, 1993: 105-106).

Desejamos sucesso e bom trabalho na CONFINTEA VI.

Prof.ª Edwiges Fernandes e Equipe, 2009

QUESTIONÁRIO FINAL

- 1) Qual a importância do curso para a sua vida acadêmica e profissional?**
- 2) Que conceito você daria às aulas de língua estrangeira? Justifique seu conceito.**
- 3) O material utilizado foi relevante e adequado aos objetivos do curso?**
- 4) Avalie o desempenho do(a) professor(a) - (competência, didática, relacionamento, etc..)**
- 5) Avalie seu desempenho como aluno. De que forma você contribuiu para o bom andamento das aulas?**
- 6) Você pretende participar de outros projetos como esse? Justifique.**
- 7) Avalie o desempenho da equipe técnica (coordenação, supervisão pedagógica, secretaria, equipe de apoio, etc...)**
- 8) Considerações Finais / Sugestões (se necessário)**

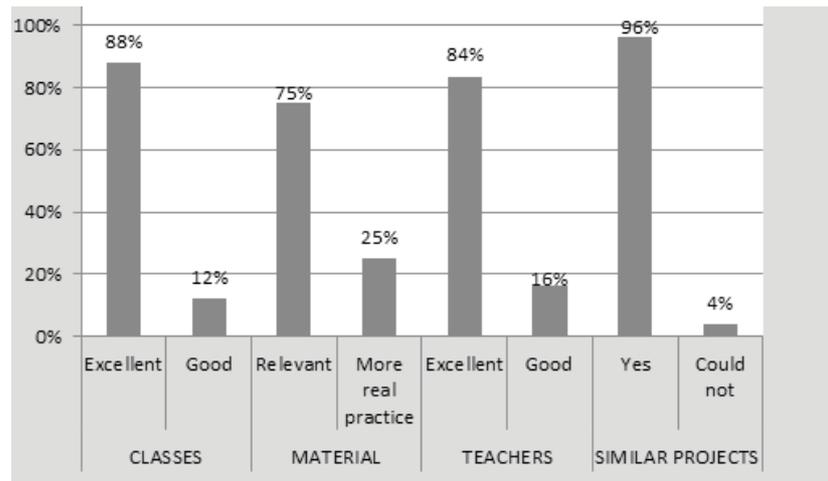
Figure 2 (Fernandes and Morhy, 2009)

Even though the purpose of this article was not to provide statistical evidences of the pedagogical experience, we did make use of some statistical support for the interpretation of the course results. The answers obtained from students' questionnaire were exemplified and analyzed in the graphic and tables exposed in this section, whereas opinions from UNESCO representative and course professors were demonstrated in a short series of selected narratives for a clear visualization of the course impacts.

Most students (188 out of 196) provided answers to the final questionnaire **as shown in graph 1:**



STUDENTS' OPINIONS



Graph 1: Students' Opinions

- When asked about the importance of this course to their academic and professional life, in the first question, 100% of the students agreed about its importance. Some remarked that by participating in the course they had a chance to review contents they had previously been exposed to, but had naturally forgotten due to lack of practice; others pointed out the importance of learning about issues related to adult education and culture, which were new for most of them, as shown in the table below:

Expressions revealing the importance of the course	"knowledge acquisition on social, cultural and economic issues"
	"professional and academic improvement"
	"academic and professional development"
	"cultural awareness"
	"possibility of new job opportunities"
	"improved linguistic competences"
	"deeper comprehension of Adult Education"

Table 3: Expressions revealing the importance of the course



- In response to the second question, 88% of the students evaluated the classes as “excellent”, and the other 12% graded them as “good”. See Graph 1: Classes
- In response to the third question, regarding the material used, 75% of the students agreed it was relevant and adequate to the course purposes, but some argued that it should have provided them with more real practice opportunities during the course. See Graph 1: Material
- In response to the fourth question, regarding the professors’ expertise, there were no depreciative comments on methodology or teacher-student interaction; instead, students made numerous compliments, as shown in the table below, and in Graph 1: Teachers.

Expressions revealing professors’ expertise	“more than a teacher, she’s an educator.”
	“lively and motivating classes”
	“great teacher-student interaction”
	“efficient, punctual, friendly, dynamic”
	“organized and competent”
	“good at using strategies and resources”
	“very good at stimulating research and students’ autonomy”

Table 4: Expressions revealing professors’ expertise

- In response to the fifth question in which students were asked to evaluate their own performance in the classes, it became evident that the experience of self-reflection was unfamiliar to them, since only a small percentage, 27%, contributed with feedbacks about their role, their interaction with their peers, as well as with their professors.

Expressions of student’s self-evaluation	“effective participation in class activities”
	“assiduous attendance and punctuality”
	“good peer interaction”
	“collaborative participation”
	“impaired participation due to shyness and lack of knowledge on the topics discussed”

Table 5: Expressions of student’s self-evaluation



- In response to the sixth question, the most meaningful figures arose. Students were asked if they intended to participate in other similar projects. Almost all students, that is, 96% said that they would like to. The other 4% justified by saying that they could not because they would travel or start job hunting right after graduation. See Graph 1: Similar Projects
- In reference to the seventh question, we concluded it was not properly understood, since approximately 70% of the students said they did not know the managing and support team very well, as they did not interact with them so often, and therefore could not evaluate them. What they did not realize was that an indirect assessment of the support team could have been made. If things were going well or not, it could have been inferred as a consequence of the work performed by these people ‘behind the scenes’.

Expressions on support team’s performance	“commitment to schedule and tasks”
	“competent provision and handling of materials”
	“prompt fulfillment of students’ needs”
	“organization was excellent”
	“notes were given in time”

Table 6: Expressions on support team’s performance

- In response to the eighth question, which was the last and open-ended question, students were asked to make suggestions, if they found it necessary. Although the great majority had a very good impression of the course, as we could see in the collected and exposed data, very few still pointed some components that could have made it more successful, as shown below:

Concluding remarks and suggestions	“we missed more logistic practice”
	“the grants should have been paid on the scheduled dates”
	“other courses of this type should be offered for further development”
	“this extremely competent team of teachers should be kept for further courses”

Table 7: Concluding remarks and suggestions



5. Conference hosts participation in the event: evaluation and feedback

The Conference hosts and hostesses worked an average of four hours a day during the four days of the event. They were spread along the facilities of the “*Hangar – Centro de Convenções da Amazônia*” as well as in the hotels, airport and means of transportation to be used by the CONFINTEA guests. They dressed accordingly, carrying their badge, and moved attentively in order to provide the necessary assistance to the delegations and visitors. Ireland (2010), one of UNESCO’s representatives who was directly involved in preparation of the event stated the following:

“During the period of the conference these hosts and hostesses worked as receptionists for delegates in airports, hotels, museums and at the Hangar building, providing information, giving directions and assistance, under the coordination of the working staff whose responsible for them. They helped us to remember that in several developing countries the young people are the ones who inhabit the “adult” educational programs and projects while they enlightened the environment with their energy, smile, good humor, irreverence and curiosity when facing the unknown.”⁷ (Ireland, 2010: 22)

The assessment indexes of the hosts’ and teachers’ performances are exemplified in the narratives below:

“I was pleased to be part of this educational program and also to work collaboratively with the coordination and professors in all the construction and development process. As for the students’ performance during the event, I was amazed to see them so engaged and happy to act in an event of paramount importance where their communicative competence in foreign languages,

7. In the original: *Durante o período da conferência, esses monitores bilingües atuaram na recepção de delegados no aeroporto, nos hotéis, nos museus e no próprio Hangar, informando, direcionando, apoiando, sob a coordenação dos grupos de trabalho a quem foram alocados. Ajudaram a lembrar que em muitos países em desenvolvimento são os jovens que povoam os programas e projetos de educação de ‘adultos’, ao tempo em que alegraram o ambiente com a sua energia, sorrisos, bom humor, irreverência e curiosidade frente ao desconhecido.*





improved during the course, was put into real proof. No sign of insecurity, no hesitation. Hosts were smoothly going through all the foreseen situations [...]” (Professor-A)

“It was an absolute pleasure to have had the opportunity to train university students to take part at the 6th CONFINTEA, as hosts to its international participants. There was a lot of research work involved and much effort was put into it, for both students and teachers. We have all matured a great deal after this unique experience.” (Professor-B)

“Being assigned to work at Sagres Hotel was very beneficial to me, since I had the opportunity to meet interesting and cultured people who made me realize that the culture of one nation goes beyond aspects such as dances and typical food. People’s way of living and education make them unique and, at the same time, similar to us. The linguistic differences bring us closer and racial skin color, or else, are mere and irrelevant stereotypes. Well, this was a small fragment of my experience as a conference host at CONFINTEA and it makes me willing to engage in any other opportunities such as this, regardless of grants or salaries[...] (Student/Host-A)

6. Final considerations

This paper has presented an experience of a FLSP course focused on developing the communicative competences in three foreign languages with emphasis on the oral comprehension and production. Undergraduate students from two public universities in Belém were selected to take part in the course in order to work at CONFINTEA VI, the international event on adult education. After the needs analysis was conducted, the tailor-made competency-based oral communication course for conference hosts was developed regarding their necessities, lacks and wants as well as the TSA. The core curriculum was conducted in a 100-hour course, and the evaluation of the course was made mainly in qualitative basis, with the purpose of understanding how the program affected the participants and their effective performance during the event.





This objective was accomplished by the use of individual questionnaires answered by the students and through narratives collected from the agents directly involved in the educational program. However, some statistic figures were also employed in order to give support to our understanding of the entire process.

The results of the evaluations, presented in the last section of this paper, revealed significant improvement of participants in terms of foreign language oral performances and knowledge on the central conference topics. Several reasons underlying the course achievements were also discussed throughout the paper. Most importantly, the study supported the use of a competency-based approach in FLSF whose characteristics have contributed a great deal for the effectiveness achieved. Some theories and principles were incorporated to construct the proper framework for the present study, more specifically those proposed by Almeida Filho (1998), Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Munby (1978) and Nunan (1988). As the experience was not initially intended to be portrayed in a scientific paper, we probably missed the opportunity of employing other data collection instruments which could have provided us with more insights about the results.

In conclusion, the results obtained in the course evaluation indicate that the course was positive and fruitful for the professional life of the participants, for their linguistic improvement and also for their general educational and cultural growth, as they dealt with these topics throughout the course. Besides, by having opportunity to use the necessary knowledge to make things meaningful, especially during the four days of the conference, they put into practice some of the basic principles stated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 128): language learning is an active process and not just a matter of linguistic knowledge. Considering the feedback given from the professors and other agents involved, after the event, we can conclude that the experience was a rich opportunity for research, interaction and human development.

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