

**THE ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ESL TEACHER TRAINEES IN DIFFERENT  
DISCOURSE DOMAINS**

by

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I declare that THE ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ESL TEACHER TRAINEES IN DIFFERENT DISCOURSE DOMAINS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## **Summary**

This study investigated the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees in different discourse domains. The sample for the study consisted of twenty ESL teacher trainees in their final year at a College of Education. Different methods were used to measure the teacher trainees' oral proficiency in the English Communication Skills class while engaging in less formal conversations and in more formal teaching of content subjects during Practice Teaching. Three categories of constructs for oral proficiency were measured: Accuracy and fluency, classroom language and non-verbal communication. The findings supported the hypothesis: The oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees is more satisfactory in some discourse domains, e.g. casual conversation, than in others, e.g. formal teaching. Although these findings cannot be regarded as conclusive they raise awareness of the problem. Recommendations were made on how to address the problem of poor oral performance of ESL teachers and teacher trainees teaching content subjects.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 The research problem

The problem that I want to investigate is that the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees seems to vary across different discourse domains.

#### The definition of terms

The definition of “proficiency” is that it refers to the degree to which a person has control over the use of the rules of language for one, some or all of its diverse aspects. Included in these rules are phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic systems as well as discourse and style rules for oral and written communication in various domains and circumstances (Dulay and Burt 1978, in Labarca & Bailey 1985:168).

The term “oral proficiency” refers to how well a person can speak a language.

The term “ESL teacher trainees” refers to teacher trainees who are expected to teach all subjects (except other languages) through the medium of English.

The term “discourse domains” here refers to units of spoken language such as casual conversations, less formal classroom interactions (role play, group work) and more formal classroom language, i.e. teaching through the medium of English in Practice Teaching situations (School-Based Studies or practice teaching at the College).

The terms BICS and CALP are very important for an understanding of a second language learner’s oral proficiency. Cummins (in Brown 1987), distinguishes between CALP (Cognitive/Academic language proficiency) and BICS (Basic interpersonal communication skills). The former entails a person’s knowledge about language forms and rules and is context-reduced communication. The latter is the person’s communicative ability, which enables him/her to function in daily interpersonal exchanges, and occurs in context-embedded communication. It seems that ESL learners’ BICS are better than their CALP, therefore they are able to perform well in tasks that require them to use low-level memorisation and application skills, but when they are confronted with tasks that require them to use higher-order thinking abilities (i.e. academic reading and writing), their performance is less than satisfactory (Cummins 1999:6).

L2 - Second Language

SBS - School-Based Studies

### **Subproblems**

In investigating Oral Proficiency as a problematic issue, other subproblems or related problems need to be examined. In spoken discourse, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical use contribute to the overall problem, and they need to be looked at.

When a student teacher's pronunciation of English words is so poor that it makes his/her language incomprehensible, his/her teaching will be ineffective. Also, if he/she uses faulty idiom and vocabulary and makes so many language errors that meaning is impeded the learners will not understand him/her, i.e. he/she will not succeed in bringing his/her message across.

Consequently an investigation into the oral proficiency of teacher trainees or student teachers would involve a closer look at language usage, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Another point in the topic that needs to be clarified is the difference between casual conversations and more formal classroom language. These two concepts are treated at length in Chapter 2 in the literature review. The different "discourse domains" referred to in the topic are casual conversations and more formal classroom language.

## **1.2 Research aims**

The justification for my research is that the weak oral performance of teacher trainees will have a negative effect on learning processes in the classroom. Teacher trainees cannot teach effectively if they cannot communicate functionally and effectively. It seems that their CALP is less developed than their BICS. Cummins (in Brown 1987:199) explains that CALP is the learners' ability to manipulate or reflect upon the surface features of language outside the immediate context, whereas BICS is the communicative abilities that all language learners acquire in order to be able to function in daily interpersonal exchanges. CALP and BICS are also explained as context-reduced and context-embedded communication respectively (Brown, 1987:199). This view is supported by Lightbown (1985:179). She contends that learners sometimes appear fluent when they speak, but outside a familiar context and under time pressure their performance in terms of comprehending language and processing complex cognitive linguistic tasks is unsatisfactory.

In Namibia, English was chosen as the official language and medium of instruction in schools, but the very abrupt switch to English caused numerous problems. In the Report of the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (1999), the issue of the Language Policy of Namibia after independence is discussed comprehensively. The Report (1999:77-79) states that:

Languages were used deliberately as a way of dividing the population into different ethnic groups who would be unable to oppose the policies of the government. Today the main concern of the Namibian government in terms of languages is to restore mother-tongues to a position of respect and to continue developing local languages and cultures. It is also of utmost importance to equip Namibians with a common lingua franca that will assist them in gaining access to the international community. This is the most important reason for the selection of English as national language of Namibia, as well as medium of instruction in schools.

However, the sudden switch to English as medium of instruction caused a number of problems. The problems mentioned in the Report that are relevant to the study are the following:

The Namibian environment does not create an atmosphere conducive for effective English learning. Many Namibian teachers are not competent enough to teach through the medium of English, in spite of different attempts made since independence to improve the language proficiency of teachers. There seems to be a lack of research in order to discover the specific language needs of teachers.

It is recommended in the Report of the Presidential Commission (1999:79) that no students should be allowed to obtain a BETD or B.Ed without passing a test of competence in English. Students should also not be admitted to a teacher-training course without having passed an English proficiency test. The importance of proficiency in English is stressed again and again in the report "since progress in education requires such proficiency" (1999:80). However, in the year 2002, students were still admitted at the four Teacher Training Colleges without passing a test of competence in English. The only requirement regarding a pass in English is an E symbol for Grade 12.

The problems mentioned in the Report (1999:78) that are relevant to the topic under investigation in this research study are discussed in Chapter 2, the review of the literature.

The issue explained above concerns me because I am a teacher educator at a College of Education. My interest in the problem springs from personal experience. In the ECS class my students speak English quite fluently, but outside the familiar context of the College, when they do Practice Teaching at schools during their School Based Studies (SBS), their oral proficiency is less than satisfactory. Teacher trainees are expected to use the target language as medium for organising, socialising and communicating in the classroom. Apart from the above, teacher trainees should be able to use English successfully to transmit knowledge or information when they teach; they should use the language effectively for managing their classes, for eliciting learner responses, etc. If the level of their oral proficiency is unsatisfactory, it will have an adverse effect on their teaching and on the learning process.

Principals and teachers at schools, as well as the teacher trainees' subject lecturers, are often dissatisfied with the way the student teachers express themselves when they teach various subjects during Practice Teaching sessions. I teach ECS and English as a major subject. In my study I wanted to test the following hypothesis - ESL teacher trainees' oral performance is more satisfactory in some discourse domains, e.g. casual conversations than in others, e.g. Practice Teaching.

If language teachers are familiar with the reasons why their teaching is not effective, they might be able to address the problem in order to improve their teaching. One of the main objectives of an ESL course (like the ECS courses offered at Namibian Colleges and the University) is to enable ESL students in general, and teacher trainees in particular, to function successfully in classrooms where English is the medium of instruction. The ESL students in this study are the teacher trainees themselves, whose oral performance was rated during ECS classes at the College, and while they taught in Practice Teaching situations.

### **1.3 Research questions and hypothesis**

Questions that I will ask as I investigate the problem are the following:

In the ECS class:

- a) How appropriate is the teacher trainee's use of English when addressing his/her lecturers or peers?
- b) How well does he/she answer/ask questions in class?
- c) How well does he/she speak in role play/group work situations?

In Practice Teaching sessions:

- a) How well does the teacher trainee use English to elicit learner responses?
- b) How well does the teacher trainee use instructions?
- c) How well does the teacher trainee use English to present concepts/subject knowledge/procedures?
- d) How accurate is the teacher trainee's grammar?
- e) How clear and accurate are the teacher trainee's pronunciation, stress and intonation?
- f) How correct is the teacher trainee's use of vocabulary?
- g) How appropriate is the teacher trainee's use of English to the learners' level of English?
- h) How well does the teacher trainee use NVC to support the meaning of his/her language?
- i) What is the teachers' perception of the teacher trainees' oral proficiency in the areas mentioned above? (MBEC:2000)

The questions developed for the Practice Teaching sessions were derived from the MBEC (2000) study.

The hypothesis is that ESL teacher trainees' oral proficiency is more satisfactory in some discourse domains, e.g. casual conversations, than in other domains, e.g. classroom teaching.

#### **1.4 The organisation of the remainder of the study**

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 is an explanation of the methodology employed in the study. The research type, subjects, materials, procedures and analysis are described and explained. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the findings, i.e. Tabulation, Analysis and Discussion of the results. Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter in which general overviews of the study and of its findings are given.

#### **1.5 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to identify the research problem that is the focus of this mini-dissertation, to contextualise the problem within a broader social background and theoretical framework, to state the aims, objectives and research approach of the study and to indicate how the rest of the study is structured.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

This chapter is the review of the literature related to the research topic. The topic is: *The oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees in different discourse domains*. Background information on the research question is provided.

The review is organised according to the major points relevant to the problem, e.g. the dimensions of oral proficiency, important results of research conducted in the area of oral proficiency, possible explanations for the nature of the language problem and the important constructs of oral proficiency.

The chapter starts with a close look at important terminology and constructs of oral proficiency explained by references to previous research and writings about the topic. Thereafter an investigation and report on the effect of insufficient oral proficiency of ESL teachers on the teaching and learning process follow. The language problem will then be explained in terms of the BICS/CALP distinction of language proficiency. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points and an evaluation of all the arguments presented.

#### 2.1 The constructs of oral proficiency

In a research study in which oral proficiency is to be investigated, it is important to know what constitutes oral production of a language learner.

The following constructs of oral proficiency of teachers were identified in the literature:

- (1) Fluency and accuracy: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation,
- (2) Classroom teaching: elicitation, instructions, explanations and level of English, and
- (3) Non-verbal communication.

The following is a discussion of these constructs and some of their underlying features, in order to point out why they are regarded as the constructs to be measured in an assessment of oral proficiency.

## Fluency

De Jong and Van Ginkel (in Verhoewen & De Jong 1992: 187 & 189) believe that fluency is the ease and smoothness of speech. They state that even the man-in-the-street regards fluency and pronunciation as the most important features on which to judge someone's oral proficiency. Ease and smoothness of speech are acquired by "automization of the integrated knowledge through recurrent exposure and use".

Lam's (1994:12) view of oral proficiency is in agreement with that of the previous authors. She discusses oral fluency by referring to the following indicators: speech rate, frequency of filled pauses and positioning of pauses. It is evident, from her discussion of research studies done on teachers at the University of Hong Kong, that speech rate is a good indicator of verbal fluency. She explains the concept "speech rate" by using phrases such as "constant flow of speech" and "periods of relative speech continuity" (Lam 1994:12). Results of her study did not support the features of frequency-filled pauses and positioning of pauses as indicators of oral fluency. One of the conclusions that can be drawn from her report is that use of vocabulary has an influence on fluency, because if the speaker's flow of speech is broken (e.g. when he/she pauses) because he/she has to search for words, fluency is impeded.

The following construct to look at is accuracy.

## Accuracy

Accuracy in oral speech production refers to good knowledge and use of vocabulary, grammatical structures and correct pronunciation, as can be inferred from the following definition of Canale (1983:7). He states that grammatical competence concerns the mastery of the language in the verbal and non-verbal modes. It concerns features such as vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics. The verbal mode then includes pronunciation and vocabulary as constituent parts of grammatical competence.

In terms of grammatical competence, De Jong and Van Ginkel ( in Verhoewen & De Jong 1999) agree with Canale (1983) on its importance for oral proficiency. They refer to a model of language proficiency that distinguishes between two dimensions of oral proficiency:

- the linguistic knowledge dimension (grammar and vocabulary)
- the dimension of channel control (pronunciation and fluency)

In the conclusion of their discussion of oral proficiency, the two writers strongly feel that a fluent and comprehensible speaker of a second language must have achieved automaticity in both dimensions - linguistic knowledge and channel control. In other words, a second language speaker with good oral proficiency will have sound knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and he/she will speak the second language fluently, demonstrating good pronunciation. Weller (in Labarca & Bailey 1985:168) cites writers who agree that oral proficiency has the components mentioned here.

This brings us to pronunciation, an important feature of fluency and accuracy, particularly related to the use of the oral mode. According to De Jong and Van Ginkel (in Verhoeven & De Jong 1992:189), pronunciation entails knowing how to pronounce, being able to apply the rules of pronunciation if one has enough time, and being able to pronounce correctly under time constraints and the pressure of communication needs.

With regard to pronunciation, Sheir and Dupuis (1987:103) argue that becoming native-like in pronunciation is one of the aims set for L2 learning, therefore acquisition of the prosodic features of the language, and becoming familiar with the sound system of the L2 should be objectives of second language acquisition. Richards et al. (1992) define prosody as variations in loudness, pitch and speech rhythm, and these phenomena are also referred to as intonation. Pronunciation, stress and intonation are therefore identified as important constructs of oral proficiency.

The importance of intonation is explained (by Sheir & Dupuis 1987) as follows: Intonation reveals a speaker's attitude or feeling towards what he/she is saying, and if non-native speakers fail in acquiring accuracy of intonation in English, their utterances will have distortions that can interfere with the transmission of information. On the other hand, a speaker's intonation, if accurate, can help the hearer to interpret his/her message or his/her utterances. Some teachers stress every word (possibly because of interference of their native language), and this influences speech tempo and the smoothness of speech (fluency) and makes their speech monotonous (Sheir & Dupuis 1987:108). In such cases learners become bored, because they find the lesson uninteresting and monotonous.

Sheir and Dupuis (1987) conclude by saying that ESL teachers should develop conscious control of intonation in order to obtain a high standard of oral proficiency in the second language. This pronouncement is also applicable to teachers who are non-native speakers of English, but who teach content subjects through the medium of English.



### **Classroom language**

The second construct to be investigated when the oral proficiency of the teacher trainees in my study is assessed, is classroom language, which involves skills in elicitation instructions, explanations and level of English to the level of English of the learners in the class.

### **Elicitation**

Elicitation means asking questions to obtain learners' ideas and suggestions. It is a useful way of getting the learners to participate, because the teacher focuses their attention and makes them think. The teacher can also find out what learners know and what they do not know, and he/she can encourage them to make guesses and work out problems for themselves (Doff 1994:133).

Criteria that should be taken into consideration when measuring elicitation skills are the following techniques:

#### **- Eliciting from pictures**

This kind of eliciting involves asking the learners to describe a picture; to interpret things that are not clear in the picture and to imagine things beyond the picture (Doff 1994:133).

- Eliciting by using a variety of question types, e.g. closed (one correct answer); open-ended (more than one correct answer); known-information (teacher knows the answer) and referential questions (asking for opinion of learners, encourage learners to speak, a range of answers can be given).
- Pausing after a question was asked, to give learners time to think.
- Encouraging a range of answers from different learners if there is more than one possible answer.
- Eliciting subject-specific vocabulary onto the blackboard, writing as learners produce answers (Doff 1994:133).

Instructions are the following component of classroom language to be discussed.

## **Instructions**

Instructions are guidelines given to the learners for answering questions, doing activities, performing in groups and pairs. They are important in any lesson and the teachers should have the ability in English to give clear and complete instructions. Instructions should also be grammatically correct (MBEC:2000). If the teacher's instructions do not meet these criteria, i.e. if he/she gives poor instructions, learners will not understand the tasks and the teacher's lesson objectives will not be attained.

## **Explanations**

In assessing a teacher or teacher trainee's ability to explain concepts, subject knowledge and procedures, one has to listen to the way in which information is communicated, and at the teacher or teacher trainee's descriptive ability.

Weller (1985, in Labarca & Bailey 1985) provides the following rating sheet:

### **Communication of information**

- Development of explanation, the degree to which ideas are coherent, logically ordered and complete.
- Use of supporting evidence, including spontaneous use of synonyms, paraphrasing and appropriate transitions to explain the term, general style.
- Ability to relate to the student, inducing an apparent willingness to share information, flexibility in responding to questions, and monitoring of the students' understanding.

Descriptive ability involves naming and describing objects, inferring relationships among objects, setting the action or objective, according to Weller (1985, in Labarca & Bailey 1985:177).

The criteria above give a comprehensive description of what to listen to when assessing explaining concepts, subject knowledge and procedures in the classroom language of a teacher or teacher trainee.

### **Teacher/teacher trainee's use of English to the level of English of the learners in the class**

In assessing the appropriacy of teacher/teacher trainee's use of English to the learners' level of English, the ability of the teacher/teacher trainee to adjust his/her English to that of the learners is considered. Some teachers talk over the heads of learners by using difficult language that is incomprehensible to the learners. Others talk down to

the learners, i.e. they talk so much and with such sense of superiority that they silence the learners. However, some teachers use difficult language, but paraphrase when they realize that the learners do not understand (MBEC:2000).

Therefore, when teacher/teacher trainee's use of English to the level of English of the learners is assessed the following criteria are important:

- The teacher's use of English is at the correct level for the class
- The teacher can adjust his/her language if it is too difficult, by paraphrasing.
- The teacher sometimes code-switches (to the native language of the learners, but only if necessary (MBEC:2000).

In assessing the classroom language of teachers/teacher trainees, the overall picture will be examined with careful consideration of the criteria for the teacher's ability to elicit, give instructions, explain concepts, and adjust his/her English to the level of English of the learners.

The next point of discussion is non-verbal communication.

### **Non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication refers to non- oral means of communication, e.g. body language. The following criteria cited by Weller (1985 in Labarca & Bailey 1985:178) can be used to assess to which extent a teacher is able to use non-verbal communication to support the meaning of his/her spoken language:

- Eye contact: Looking at the learner during the explanation or when the learner gives an answer.
- Other non-verbal aspects, e.g. gestures, facial expressions, posture, no distracting behaviours.

If the teacher praises the learner for an answer, saying "Excellent answer", but his/her facial expression does not show that he/she is pleased, the learner will see the compliment as insincere.

## **2.2 Different discourse domains**

### **Social and classroom discourse**

Tsui Bik-may (1987) performed an analysis of different types of interaction in ESL classroom discourse in Primary and Secondary schools in Hong Kong. She describes

social and classroom discourse, and focuses on the differences and similarities between the two. She states that in social discourse, beliefs and assumptions are shared by the speaker and the hearer. Communication is made possible by knowledge of the rules of discourse. In social discourse, meaning is negotiated between the speaker and the hearer 'to achieve social convergence' (Tsui Bik-may 1987:337). The author is of the opinion that much social interaction can occur in a classroom and that teachers should aim at generating interaction that is truly communicative in their classes. Tsui Bik-may

(1987:345) suggests that typical classroom discourse is 'pedagogically processed' and 'contrived'. There is a rigid pattern. The teacher asks a question to check the learner's knowledge and his question is the initiating move. The learner's answer will be the responding move, which is usually predetermined and not negotiated.

In the communicative classroom, such rigid patterns are to be avoided, therefore the teachers should plan stimulating activities (e.g. pair and group work), in order to allow learners to engage in social interaction.

### **Casual conversation**

Casual conversation forms part of the 'social discourse' described by Tsui Bik-may (1987). Gardner (1984), Richards (1980) and Allen et al. (1984) provide a detailed account of what constitutes conversation: Casual conversation is the most basic form of language use. It uses the spoken channel and is informal. Topics arise casually during conversation rather than being predetermined. Power relationships between participants are usually equal, but there may be social distance. The social relationships of the participants in a conversation may be equal, i.e. they may be peers, friends or classmates. This will have a definite influence on the conversation. However, casual conversations also occur in situations where there may be social distance between the participants, i.e. a teacher and his learners, in which case conversational aspects such as turn taking, address terms and register will be slightly different from those in a conversation between friends or classmates. The purpose of the conversation is maintaining good relations or transmitting information.

Richards (1980:414) states that participants in a conversation bring to it shared assumptions and expectations about what it is, how it develops and the sort of contribution each of them is expected to make. He is of the opinion that participants in a conversation share common principles so that each one's utterance is a contribution to the conversation. Both Gardner (1984) and Richards (1980) refer to the principles of conversation, e.g. the co-operative principle. The co-operative principle of Grice (1975) is explained at length by Cook (1989:29-30). According to this principle the speaker in a conversation should obey four maxims:

The maxim of quality -	to be true
The maxim of quantity -	to be brief
The maxim of relevance -	to be relevant
The maxim of manner -	to be clear

Using his/her general knowledge of the world, and the assumption that the speaker is obeying these four maxims, the hearer interprets the speaker's utterances.

Allen et al. (1984) suggest that the gap between typical classroom discourse and social discourse should be narrowed by using methods in the L2 classroom that closely resemble the conditions under which children learn the L1 because L2 learning is very similar to L1 learning. The writers recommend the following strategies:

**(a) Strategy 1**

The use of authentic materials in the classroom to prepare L2 students for the kinds of discourse they will encounter outside the classroom.

**(b) Strategy 2**

Classroom topics of a broad range will contribute to an acquisition-rich environment. Such topics can include conversational issues beyond the classroom and home environment.

The above strategies are implemented in ESL classes at our College to give students practice is using English for issues pertaining to real-life situations. The activities used in the classroom simulate the outside world. The casual conversations in the ESL classroom of my research study include role-plays, dialogues, small-group discussions and pair work that will have the characteristics of the activities described above. In such classroom exchanges, the interaction is similar to that in social exchanges in which meaning is negotiated between interlocutors; therefore the speaker and hearer are engaged in an interpretative process (Tsui Bik-may 1987:336).

## **2.3 The oral proficiency of ESL teachers and teacher trainees**

### **The effects of poor oral proficiency**

In many articles on ESL, teachers expressed grave concern in terms of the oral proficiency of teachers who teach English as an L2 or teachers who use an L2 as medium of instruction in other subject areas.

Schrade (1992:3-5) found that most ESL teachers are conscientious about their work and want to do a good job, but are hampered in their efforts because of inadequacy resulting from the fact that they are often products of traditional training and have not had exposure to native speakers. Consequently these teachers have inhibitions in terms of speaking English for fear of making mistakes. These teachers openly admitted their inadequacy and expressed a strong desire and need for oral competency. She found that teachers' confidence increased when they had some instruction in oral proficiency that caused improvement in their oral competence.

Kgomoeswana (1993:11) even believes that ESL teachers use code switching because of language incompetence. He states that teachers with an insufficient command of the language of instruction code-switch to the first language to explain a concept. In Namibian classrooms, we sometimes find that nearly all the instruction is done in the teacher's first language.

Puhl and Swarts (1995:2) express concern about the constant negative impact the teachers' poor quality of English is going to have on learners who actually need good role models of language use. They feel that it is not fair to the teachers themselves to be put in a situation in which they lack the language skills needed for them to cope. In light of this, Puhl & Swarts (1995) recognise the need in South Africa for a good, feasible and credible assessment of English language proficiency of pre-service teachers. They state that the teachers' English proficiency will determine to which extent they will be effective in meeting the demands of a multi-cultural and non-racial society. In South Africa there are eleven official languages and the very important role of English as medium of instruction is emphasised.

Cullen (1994:163) discusses similar effects of a poor command of English on teachers and their teaching strategies, and strongly recommends the incorporation of a language improvement programme in a teacher-training course, in order to improve the English language proficiency of prospective teachers, so that they can teach more confidently.

In a recent study conducted by a British teacher development project, the English Language Teacher Development Programme (ELTDP), which involved Namibian Education Officers, principals, teachers and teacher trainees, alarming results in terms of teachers' and teacher trainees' oral proficiency (in English) were reported and the researchers recommended the investigation of rigorous strategies to improve levels of English proficiency among Namibia's teachers and teacher trainees (MBEC 2000:8).

The following is a summary of the results of the MBEC (2000) study:

### **Constructs of oral proficiency measured**

- **Vocabulary and pronunciation**

These dimensions do not seem to be a big problem, but in a few other dimensions of oral proficiency, there is cause for concern.

- **Teacher trainees' level of English to their learners' level of English**

It was found that 17% of College students are "below acceptable level" in terms of their use of English to the learners' level of English. They seem to be unable to adjust their language to suit different learner levels (MBEC 2000:148). This problem can have serious consequences. The learners, who are excluded because of the teachers' inability to adjust their level of English to suit theirs, may become demotivated and withdrawn. Others may become restless and disruptive because of boredom and may interfere with the learning opportunities of the rest of the group. Learners who are too shy to express their lack of understanding to the teacher withdraw themselves, do not participate, and learn very little or not at all.

- **Explaining concepts**

Disappointing results in the areas of explaining concepts, grammatical accuracy and elicitation were reported. For explaining concepts 23% of BETD teachers and 16% of College students are reported to be 'below acceptable level'. In fact, many teachers of subjects other than English, irrespective of phase, training or region, have problems in explaining new concepts to their learners (MBEC 2000:38 & 42). The teaching of concepts through an L2 in a way that learners can understand is regarded as one of the most difficult skills a teacher has to acquire.

- **Elicitation skills**

General inability to convey meaning and poor elicitation skills of Namibian teachers may result in the hampering of meaningful learning in schools in Namibia (MBEC 2000:63).

- **Grammatical accuracy**

In terms of the grammatical-use construct of oral proficiency, it was reported that the number of grammar errors appearing in the classroom language of

teachers is very disturbing, with 23% of Lower Primary, 23% of Upper Primary and 15% of Junior Secondary teachers of subjects other than English performing less than satisfactorily for their respective phases.

### **The effects of good oral proficiency**

Moskowitz (1976) conducted research in order to find out what makes 'good' teachers 'good', in other words, what contributes to teacher effectiveness. The results of the study

indicated that outstanding teachers had an excellent command of the second language, whereas typical teachers ranged from fair to excellent, mostly good.

The behaviours used most often by outstanding and typical teachers were asking questions, giving information and giving directions. Asking questions and giving information are viewed as strategies to communicate the content (content transmission). The following findings of the Moskowitz (1976) study in terms of outstanding teachers are relevant in the discussion of the oral proficiency of teachers or teacher trainees:

- (a) More total use of the L2 by the teacher and the students.
- (b) More teacher talk in the L2.
- (c) More indirect behaviours - praise, encouragement to expand learners' opportunities to participate.
- (d) More non-verbal indirect behaviours.
- (e) More use of praise and humour.
- (f) More use of personalized questions.
- (g) More non-verbal information giving, e.g. gesturing (Moskowitz 1976:146).

In the first section of the literature review, the constructs of oral proficiency to be examined were discussed at length. Most writers agree that accuracy and fluency are important constructs, and that they entail grammatical competence, vocabulary, pronunciation and smoothness of speech. Some feel that NVC and classroom language should also be measured when oral proficiency is assessed. Thereafter an account of the articles read and research conducted in terms of the poor oral proficiency of ESL teachers and teacher trainees was given. These articles clearly illustrated that poor oral proficiency of a teacher who uses English (or any L2) as medium of instruction has a negative effect on the teaching and learning process. This problem causes lack of self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy in the teachers or teacher trainees. Although some teachers and teacher trainees are aware of the problem and admit that they have a problem, others feel that they can speak English quite fluently and do not need any support. The results of the MBEC (2000) report are very important because they relate directly to the problem under discussion. The results of the study of Moskowitz (1976) were discussed to illustrate the advantages of a good or excellent

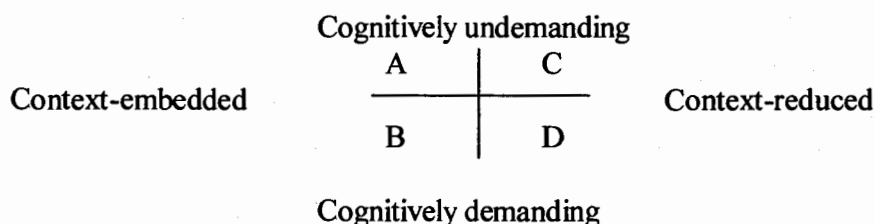


command of an L2 in the teaching of the L2 or other subjects. The next section of the literature review is a discussion of the nature of the language problem.

## 2.4 The nature of the language problem

Starfield (1992) and others clarified the nature of the language problem in terms of the BICS/CALP distinction. Cummins (1979:1980) in Brown (1987) and Starfield (1992) distinguished between Cognitive/Academic language proficiency (CALP) and Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). Cummins' framework (in Starfield 1992:3) is based on two intersecting continua (see figure 2.1).

**Fig. 2.1 Range of contextual support and degree of cognitive involvement in communicative activities**



One continuum involves the range of contextual support available for expressing or receiving meaning. At the one end of this continuum, we find 'context-embedded' communication, and at the other, 'context-reduced' communication. Context-embedded communication occurs when participants actively negotiate meaning in a face-to-face situation, e.g. in everyday, interpersonal exchanges (Starfield 1992) and this relates to BICS, which is the communicative capacity that all children acquire in order to function in everyday conversations (Brown 1987:199). In context-embedded communication, the contextual support available in the learning situation is quite sufficient (Smith 1998:9).

Starfield (1992) explains that the other continuum deals with the degree of active cognitive involvement in the task or activity at hand. The two opposite poles of the continuum represent the 'cognitively undemanding' and 'cognitively demanding' features. The tasks can be cognitively demanding or less demanding depending on the amount of information that has to be processed simultaneously by the person in carrying out the exercise. Obviously academic tasks will be found at the cognitively demanding end of the continuum, because academic tasks entail language use in situations where contextual clues are often absent and in which abstract concepts are used (Cummins 1984, in Smith 1998:9).

In figure 2.1 there are also the four quadrants A, B, C and D. BICS fall within the quadrant A skills, e.g. cognitively undemanding and context-embedded, and can be developed outside the classroom. On the other hand, the CALP skills fall within the quadrant D skills and are cognitively demanding and context-reduced communication or tasks. The typical academic skills at tertiary institutions and the more formal classroom and school-oriented language fall within quadrant D (Starfield 1992). It appears that schools in general do not promote CALP skills in the L1 and L2, and teachers experience problems in explaining content subject concepts, because of poor language proficiency in an L2. This problem directly relates to the problem at issue and explains why teachers and teacher trainees' oral proficiency appears to differ across discourse domains.

Cummins (1984, in Smith 1998:8) argues that BICS in the L1 as well as the L2 develop relatively independently of each other, but CALP in both languages develops relatively dependently. Consequently the level of competence an L2 learner may reach in the target language in CALP depends to a certain extent on his/her proficiency in the first language.

An L2 learner should therefore be able to think and communicate through his/her native language at a relatively advanced level in order for these skills to be transferred to the L2. Unfortunately this is not always the case. The teacher trainees under discussion can speak their native language fluently in everyday situations, but in most cases they cannot think and communicate through their native languages at an advanced (or academic) level.

The above distinction is supported by studies reported by Lightbown (1985:179). She states that one of the generalizations drawn from second language research, is that a learner's ability to understand language in meaningful contexts is better than his/her ability to understand decontextualized language, and his/her ability to produce complex and accurate language. She explains that learners are fluent and have communicative competence when they speak, but when they have to comprehend and produce language in context-reduced communication (outside a helpful context), under time pressure, or language that requires complex cognitive and linguistic processing, they make serious mistakes.

In Bloom's taxonomy (Duminy et al. 1992), a scheme including three domains has been developed - the cognitive domain, the affective domain and the psychomotor domain. The cognitive domain involves the acquiring and manipulating of factual information and the developing of intellectual abilities and skills. The affective domain deals with emotions, attitudes, values and moral judgments. The psychomotor domain is concerned with physiological and psychomotor skills.

In order to understand why academic tasks will be found at the cognitively demanding end of the continuum as stated before, a closer look at Bloom's cognitive domain is needed. According to Duminy et al. (1992) Bloom distinguishes six major levels, i.e knowledge,

comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The three levels mentioned last - analysis, synthesis and evaluation - make it possible to measure intellectual abilities capable of processes that are more complex than simply recalling of facts. These are the higher-order thinking skills needed for academic tasks. Although the first three levels are also involved (knowledge, comprehension, application), academic tasks focus more on analysis, synthesis and evaluation and these are applicable in various subjects (Lynd 1996). Analysis involves breaking ideas into their constituent parts and the ability to compare and contrast.

Inductive reasoning is necessary to analyse something and for this, sound language skills are needed. Synthesis involves putting together information in order to produce something new,

predict possible outcomes, or devise different solutions to problems. Evaluation has to do with making and defending a judgment, or justifying a decision (Duminy et al. 1992 & Lynd 1996).

Donaldson's (1978, in Oller 1983:117) views about the language problem are more or less in line with the explanations above. He contends that young children's early thought processes and language use develop within meaningful contexts in which words become logical, as a result of a perception of the speaker's intentions and other noticeable features of the situation.

Therefore the normal productive speech of adults and children is firmly embedded into a context of immediate goals, intentions and familiar situations. In addition, it is stated that outside familiar contexts, entirely different demands are made in terms of cognitive processes and production of language. It then becomes necessary for the individual to focus on the linguistic forms themselves, rather than on cues.

Weller (1985, in Labarca & Bailey 1985:170) too, found Cummins's theory most useful in explaining the theoretical considerations of his study about the design of an oral proficiency instrument for Spanish to native and non-native speakers. The results of the interviews he conducted showed that the interviewees who found the interview difficult had a low level of language proficiency and were at the context-reduced end of the continuum, whereas those who performed well during the interview showed a high degree of language proficiency and were at the context-embedded end of the continuum.

Weller (1985, in Labarca & Bailey 1985) then explains that pre-school children seem to understand language fairly easily, but it should be taken into consideration that it is not only the words they understand, because they rely heavily on the meaningful context and other cues. Oller (1987:117) argues that teachers overestimate the extent to which ESL students have overcome difficulties with English, because often children seem very fluent when they speak, because they only speak about topics they choose to speak about.

Chamot and O'Malley (1987:228) report more or less the same finding in terms of minority language students who participated in ESL programmes in the United States. These students may perform satisfactorily when their language proficiency is assessed, and their teachers might feel that they are quite proficient in English communicative skills, but when they are mainstreamed into the all-English curriculum, they are faced with severe difficulties. These problems are caused by the increased language demands made by the academic curriculum. In the upper grades, the language of subjects like social studies, science and mathematics becomes more academic (context-reduced) and more remote from the language of everyday communication than is the case at primary grade level. Various researchers, according to Chamot and O'Malley (1987), have indicated that the development of these academic skills (CALP) lags behind the development of social communicative skills (BICS), often by as much as five to seven years. In the academic curriculum, the focus is on academic competence rather than simply on communicative competence, according to information given by the above researchers.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The chapter is a review of the literature related to a research study conducted in order to find out whether the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees differs in various discourse domains. Reports by Sheir and Dupuis (1987), Lam (1994) as well as the article of the De Jong and Van Ginkel (1992 in Verhoeven & De Jong) indicated that the constructs of grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency are important constructs to be considered in assessing oral proficiency.

The nature of the language problem is explained in terms of the BICS/CALP distinction made by Cummins in Brown (1987), Starfield (1992) and Smith (1997). There seems to be a discrepancy between the second language learners' oral performance in different discourse domains. Second language learners perform quite well when their oral proficiency is assessed in natural situations when engaging in context-reduced communication. However, when their oral proficiency is assessed in formal situations, e.g. the more academic-oriented classroom, their performance is less than satisfactory. The reason for this problem appears to be that their BICS are more developed than their CALP. BICS refer to a second language learners' natural communicative capacity to function in everyday conversations and CALP is the skills needed to process cognitively demanding language tasks in context-reduced situations. It was found that a language learner's CALP lags behind his BICS with about five to seven years. Therefore, in tertiary institutions, when faced with the language demands of an academic programme, students experience severe difficulties.

The discourse domains examined in this research were casual conversations as manifested in ESL classroom activities like role play, small group discussions, dialogues, etc., and typical classroom discourse that occurs in more formal academic

situations, e.g. the formal classroom of the content subjects. The article of Tsui Bik-may (1987) on the analysis of social and classroom discourse indicated that the discourse in ESL classes can be and should be context-reduced communication that is of a more social interaction type. The discourse in content subject classrooms tend to be 'pedagogically processed', i.e. more rigid and context-reduced. The description of what constitutes casual conversation given by Richards (1980), Gardner (1984) and Allen et al. (1984) is also invaluable information. A close study of the oral proficiency of teachers and teacher trainees revealed alarming results in at least one report (MBEC 2000), but more research

is needed in order to establish whether poor oral proficiency is really such a major problem. The effects of insufficient oral proficiency on teaching and learning were found to be:

- feelings of helplessness and inadequacy among teachers with a poor command of the L2,
- lack of self-confidence,
- ineffectiveness in their teaching that negatively impacts on the learning processes in their classes, and
- a strong desire for support and instruction, but in some cases denial that there is a problem.

On the other hand Moskowitz (1976) found that excellent teachers have an excellent command of the L2.

The literature review gives an indication that the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees may differ across discourse domains, but the results of a few studies cannot be regarded as conclusive. It is clear that more research in this area is needed. The next chapter is a discussion of the methodology of this study in which such research is undertaken.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

In Chapter 3 the methodology chosen to conduct this research is described. Information on subjects, data collection, venues and data analysis procedures are also provided.

#### **3.1 Approach**

The approach of the research was relatively synthetic-holistic and field-focused because I concentrated on a fairly general picture: In my investigation of the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees in different discourse domains, I rated the teacher trainees' oral performance in terms of a number of features. The research was field-focused, i.e. it was conducted in natural classroom situations, and no intervention took place, as opposed to an experimental design (Leedy 1993:186). The participants' oral proficiency was rated in ESL classes at the College during informal classroom interactions, as well as in more formal situations when they did their Practice Teaching at schools. The constructs of oral proficiency investigated were grammar, vocabulary, elicitation, giving instructions, explanations, level of English, non-verbal communication.

#### **3.2 Purpose**

The theoretical purpose of my research was deductive, because I had a definite hypothesis that I wanted to test, consequently I worked from the hypothesis to the data (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:29). Although the research started off as heuristic-inductive, it became deductive to a certain extent. I had a specific theory in mind, that there might be problems in terms of the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees when they use the L2 as medium of instruction, but I did not start with specific ideas and expectations of the data and findings of the research. I was going to collect my data with the theoretical purpose of investigating them to see what patterns emerged (Tutorial Letter 101 2001). However, the literature study done served a heuristic purpose, because it made me consider specific questions and I arrived at a hypothesis.

The literature review revealed that learners of English as an L2 are quite proficient in using English in natural, context-embedded situations, e.g. casual conversations, but they experience severe problems in expressing themselves in an academic situation (Chamot & O'Malley:1987). In another study, it was found that the ratings for the use of English of ESL teacher trainees in an academic situation, i.e. classroom teaching, were unsatisfactory (MBEC 2000:33).

Therefore my hypothesis was: ESL teacher trainees' oral proficiency is more satisfactory in some discourse domains than in others.

### **3.3 Design**

My research was essentially qualitative with a few descriptive qualities. Both qualitative and descriptive research provide descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally, with no intervention of an experiment or treatment (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:116). As already mentioned, my research took place under natural conditions. The nature of the data required determined the choice of this design. Leedy (1993:185) describes observation, the method I chose to conduct my research, as a qualitative research methodology.

According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989:30, 117), however, qualitative research is not deductive because it does not have a hypothesis, whereas descriptive research can be either heuristic or deductive. The focus of my research was narrowed down after the secondary research when I arrived at a question: Is the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees more satisfactory in some discourse domains than in others? The hypothesis (see under Purpose) was the descriptive feature of the study. However, the study also had qualitative characteristics. I wanted to view the separate parts of 'oral proficiency' (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, elicitation) as a coherent whole.

### **3.4 Subjects**

According to Nunan (1992:142), even in small scale research project, the researcher should make efforts to secure a representative sample, and this can be done by using the variables he/she deems important, e.g. age, gender, native language.

My subjects were chosen purposefully to learn about the range of behaviours related to the research focus – oral proficiency, in order to gain understanding of the complex phenomenon in question. The participants were a class of twenty teacher trainees in their third (and final) year of study. This class can be regarded as a typical third-year class at a teacher training college in Namibia. The teacher trainees were men and women between the ages of twenty and twenty-five (young adults). They are from different cultural backgrounds and from various regions in Namibia. They are all non-native speakers of English. They speak different indigenous Namibian languages, e.g. Otjiherero, Oshivambo, Khoe-Khoe-gowab, Silozi, Rukwangali and Afrikaans.

The student teachers are trained to teach different subjects (Social Studies, Mathematics, Science and Accounting) through the medium of English. The teacher trainees were in their naturally occurring groups in which they were originally placed in their first year, according to their major subjects. I tried to make provision for randomisation by choosing the class of teacher trainees that best reflected the distribution of teacher trainees in terms of region, age group, gender, culture, first language and major subject area of study although I could not be sure how successful this attempt would be. Since the student teachers are in one of my third-year ECS classes at the college, they were quite willing to be participants in the study after I explained the purpose of the research, as well as the procedures to them.

### **3.5 Collection of data**

In selecting the materials to be used to conduct the research it was necessary to determine what constitutes the data of the study.

#### **3.5.1 Data**

- (a) Verbal data from the social environment were collected. The following categories of behaviours were identified to describe the oral proficiency of the teacher trainees in practice teaching situations and in ESL classes at the College.
  - (1) Fluency and accuracy: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation,
  - (2) Classroom teaching: elicitation, instructions, explanations, level of English,
  - (3) Non-verbal communication.
- (b) Data concerning the teachers' perception of the teacher trainees' oral proficiency were also obtained.

#### **3.5.2 Venues**

The venues of the research were the College – during ECS classes and the classrooms at schools where the student teachers did their Practice Teaching.

#### **3.5.3 Instruments**

##### **(a) Observation bandscales**

Observations are one of the procedures used to obtain data in qualitative research. The most important use of observations is examining a behaviour while it is going on (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:162). According to these researchers (1989:162), observations make it possible to study a behaviour very closely while many of the variables in the context are present (naturally occurring) and this is very important when language behaviours are being researched.



However, the authors caution against the use of observations, because the closeness can cause biases that may affect the researchers' objectivity, and the presence of the researcher in the classroom may result in a change of behaviour of the participants, e.g. they may behave in a way they think they are expected to behave.

In my study the behaviour under investigation was "oral proficiency" and I observed and rated the constructs mentioned in 3.5.1. I conducted structured observations for each of the twenty participants. The instrument used to rate the teacher trainees' oral proficiency during the observations was bandscales taken and adapted from the MBEC (2000) report on the oral proficiency of Namibian teachers. An example of the bandscales is given below. Eight bandscales were used to assess the behaviours mentioned in the paragraph describing the data. The bandscales were five-point rating scales – A to E, where A represents the best rating, e.g. excellent pronunciation and E the lowest rating (unsatisfactory or below acceptable level pronunciation).

**(a) Classroom Observation Bandscales**

**Instructions**

1. While observing the lesson record the following information in the space provided on the Bandscales:
  - incorrect language
  - justification or explanations for giving a particular grade
  - examples of incorrect vocabulary, grammar, poor instructions
  - examples of good and poor practice of non-verbal communication
  - any other information you feel should be noted down
2. At the end of the lesson select one grade for each bandscale and encircle it.

**Bandscales**

1. How accurate is the teacher trainee's grammar?

A.	Virtually no grammatical errors.
B.	A few grammatical errors.
C.	Fairly accurate, only some errors of minor consequence.
D.	Some disturbing errors that impede communication.
E.	Almost every utterance contains errors.

2. How clear and accurate are the teacher trainee's pronunciation, stress and intonation?

A.	Very good pronunciation, stress and intonation.
B.	Very few errors in pronunciation, stress and intonation.
C.	Satisfactory pronunciation, stress and intonation, only a few basic errors.
D.	Unsatisfactory pronunciation, stress and intonation.
E.	Numerous errors in pronunciation, stress and intonation, to such an extent that teacher trainee is hardly understood.

3. How correct is the teacher trainee's use of vocabulary?

A.	Vocabulary is used correctly.
B.	Only a few errors in vocabulary use.
C.	Adequate use of vocabulary generally, but a few mistakes occur.
D.	Inadequate use of vocabulary leads to communication breakdown.
E.	Very difficult to understand due to frequent incorrect vocabulary use.

4. How appropriate is the teacher trainee's use of English to the learners' level of English?

<b>A.</b>	Teacher trainee's use of English is always at the correct level for his/her class.
<b>B.</b>	Teacher trainee's use of English is usually at the correct level for his/her class.
<b>C.</b>	Teacher trainee's use of English is only sometimes below/above the level for his/her class.
<b>D.</b>	Teacher trainee's use of English is often below/above the level for his/her class.
<b>E.</b>	Teacher trainee's use of English is far below/above the level for his/her class.

5. How well developed are the teacher trainee's elicitation skills?

<b>A.</b>	Teacher trainee uses English excellently to elicit learner responses.
<b>B.</b>	Teacher trainee uses English well to elicit learner responses.
<b>C.</b>	Teacher trainee uses English satisfactorily to elicit responses.
<b>D.</b>	Teacher trainee's eliciting skills are underdeveloped.
<b>E.</b>	Teacher trainee elicits almost no responses.

6. How well does the teacher trainee use instructions?

<b>A.</b>	Very clear instructions from the trainee.
<b>B.</b>	Instructions are almost always clear and sufficient.
<b>C.</b>	Adequate and sufficient instructions, but misunderstandings do occur.
<b>D.</b>	Instructions are not at all clear and sufficient.
<b>E.</b>	Inappropriate.

7. How well does the teacher trainee use English to explain concepts, subject knowledge, procedures?

<b>A.</b>	Excellent explanations, introductions, illustrations.
<b>B.</b>	Good explanations, introductions, illustrations.
<b>C.</b>	Adequate explanations, introduction, illustrations, summaries.
<b>D.</b>	Rather unclear presentations.
<b>E.</b>	Not adequate.

8. How well does the teacher trainee use NVC to support the meaning of his/her language?

<b>A.</b>	Excellent use of NVC – gestures, expressions, visuals.
<b>B.</b>	Good use of NVC.
<b>C.</b>	Adequate use of NVC.
<b>D.</b>	Poor use of NVC.
<b>E.</b>	Hardly any meaningful use of NVC.

**(b) Band descriptors**

In the ESL or ECS classroom at the College I, the ESL teacher educator, used band descriptors almost similar to the bandscales to assess the teacher trainees' oral proficiency while they engaged in less formal interactions. An example of the band descriptors is given on the next page.

There are similarities and differences between the band descriptors and the bandscales. The criteria used in the band descriptors are: fluency, accuracy and context required. However, in the band descriptors the underlying constructs of fluency and accuracy, i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are not measured separately, but as integral parts of the first two constructs. For instance, provision is made for the vocabulary construct in describing fluency by using descriptors like "can use a wide range of vocabulary and phrases", "can generally convey meaning correctly". To measure grammatical accuracy descriptors like "accurate use of language" and "correction of errors" are used as criteria for accuracy in the band descriptors.

The band descriptors are not used when the language used by the teacher trainees when they teach is rated, therefore the construct of classroom language which includes elicitation, giving instructions, explaining concepts and use of English to the level of English of the learners are omitted from the band descriptors.

The construct of non-verbal communication is also not mentioned pertinently in the band descriptors, but it is taken into consideration during assessment under the descriptor, "uses different styles of communication".

**BAND DESCRIPTORS FOR ASSESSMENT OF SPEAKING**

**A.**

**fluency:** can speak confidently in a wide range of situations, fully and fluently conveying ideas and experience, can use a wide range of vocabulary and phrases, including colloquialisms; can generally convey meaning accurately, even in complex situations; uses different styles of communication as appropriate, moving with ease between first language and English.

**accuracy:** usually accurate, whatever the context, including communication conducted at speed; most mistakes are self corrected.

**context required:** no requirements, but may need guidance in specific situations, e.g. practice for an interview.

## B.

**fluency:** can maintain a conversation with some confidence; can move between topics and express feelings and opinions in structured situations, though expression may be restricted in less structured situations or on abstract topics; can rephrase, use various strategies to get message across, ask for specific help, e.g. use of a particular word; can usually convey general meaning adequately and is beginning to include some detail and development of ideas; is beginning to use different styles of communication, e.g. register.

**accuracy:** accurate in simple tasks; accurate in more difficult situations with support; often recognises errors.

**context required:** some help to maintain conversation and explanation of specialised or unfamiliar language.

## C.

**fluency:** can initiate with some confidence and respond relevantly on familiar topics or in structured situations, using a range of basic language functions, though hesitations may sometimes affect communication; can use a range of familiar words and phrases; can rephrase, search for words, ask for help, check understanding; can adequately convey general meaning, though may lack detail and development of ideas; can recognise some errors;

**accuracy:** usually accurate in simple tasks; transfers language between situations, though there may be frequent structural errors in more difficult tasks or unfamiliar situations;

**context required:** co-operative with other speaker/s to maintain conversation in structured situations or on familiar topics.

## D.

Does not meet the basic criteria in terms of fluency and accuracy mentioned in C.

## (c) Questionnaires

According to Nunan (1992:140), surveys are commonly used for collecting data in most areas of social inquiry, e.g. education. He cites Cohen & Manion (1985) who stated that surveys are the most commonly used descriptive method in educational research and they may be large-scale, involving thousands of participants, or small scale, involving a single researcher and only twenty-five participants. The purpose is to obtain a look into conditions, attitudes or events at a single point in time.

Leedy (1993:180) delineates the descriptive survey as a qualitative research instrument. He explains that a descriptive survey is careful observation of the population, meticulous recording of what the researcher observes and studying (analysing and interpreting) the records. Moreover, survey research is, like observations, different from experimental research in a number of ways, one of which is the role of the researcher. In survey research the researcher does not manipulate the objects or subjects of research, he/she only observes them or asks them to provide data (Nunan 1992:140).

Questionnaires and interviews are methods through which survey data are collected, according to Nunan (1992) and Irwin (1999). Nunan (1992:143) is also of the opinion that questionnaires are a fairly popular means of collecting data among graduate students, because a questionnaire enables the collection of data in field settings, and data can easily be quantified, as opposed to data from field notes, participant observer's journals and transcripts of language.

I chose questionnaires to collect data pertaining to the oral proficiency of the teacher trainees from their teachers.

Irwin (1999:4) gives the following information about questionnaires:

He defines a questionnaire as a series of questions set out on paper. On the questionnaire space is provided for an answer, or a number of fixed alternatives are given from which the respondent should make a choice. Questionnaires can be used to collect qualitative as well as quantitative data.

Moreover, Irwin (1999:5) argues that questionnaires can be completed individually (at home or at work), or in a group. They can also be posted to the respondents, hand-delivered or administered to an audience (e.g. a class of learners or students), and can even be e-mailed. The respondents are the people who are going to complete the questionnaires and completing and returning the questionnaires vary according to the circumstances. Questionnaires are most useful and appropriate when the researcher wants to collect a large amount of data, but they can be designed to suit specific needs and purposes. Questionnaires can be quite flexible, depending on how the questions were constructed and on how they were designed (Irwin 1999:5-6).

There are basically two types of questionnaires: structured and unstructured questionnaires. According to Seliger & Shohamy (1989:173), the researcher can use closed as well as open-ended questions in an unstructured questionnaire. The questionnaire will have a low degree of explicitness, because in an open-ended question the respondent can decide what to say, and how to say it. On the other hand, the structured questionnaire has a high degree of explicitness, because a number of responses are given to each question, and the respondent has to select one among

these alternatives as his/her response. The range of possible responses in this case is determined by the researcher (Nunan 1992:143).

Surveys generally follow well-used procedures and Irwin (1999 Appendix, Box 1) suggests the following steps in developing an effective questionnaire:

1. Identify the purpose or objectives for which the questionnaire is being prepared. What information do you hope to obtain from the questionnaire?
2. Identify the characteristics of the potential respondents (e.g. age, vocabulary) and try and see through the eyes of the respondents while constructing the questions.
3. Choose a response format (types of questions, layout). If your data are going to be computerised, it needs to be considered at this stage.
4. Phrase the questions keeping points 1, 2 and 3 in mind. Try the questions and revise them.
5. Assemble the questionnaire.
6. Pilot-test it at least once on a group or groups drawn from your population, but not on your subjects.
7. Administer the questionnaire in the way you chose to do it.

Naturally one wants to know what the advantages and/or disadvantages are of using a specific method or instrument for the collection of data before finally deciding on using it. Seliger and Shohamy (1989:74) and Nunan (1992:144) give the following advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires:

#### **ADVANTAGES**

- They are self-administered and can be given to many subjects simultaneously.
- They are less expensive than other procedures, e.g. interviews.
- Where anonymity is guaranteed, subjects are willing to give information of a sensitive nature more easily in a questionnaire.
- The data given are more uniform and standard because all the subjects complete the same questionnaire.



- More accurate data are obtained because the subjects usually complete the questionnaires at the same time.
- Closed questions are easy and quick to answer and the responses can easily be collated and analysed.

### **DISADVANTAGES**

- It is time-consuming and difficult to construct a reliable questionnaire.
- A low return rate of questionnaires can influence the validity of findings (make findings less valid).
- The information obtained by means of structured questionnaires is less useful than that obtained through unstructured questionnaires because only checks are given.
- While unstructured questionnaires may result in more useful or insightful data, they are difficult to quantify.

Nunan (1992:145) suggests that a questionnaire should be piloted because an inexperienced researcher may collect the data only to realise afterwards that he/she collected data that are not relevant to the objectives of the study. It is also advisable to attach a short covering letter to the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire should be stated, respondents should be assured of confidentiality, the importance of their contributions should be stressed, and the name of the person conducting the survey and the organisation or institution should be written on the covering letter (Cohen & Manion 1994:97 & 98). An example of a covering letter is given in Appendix 1.

I used structured questionnaires to get information about the teachers' perception of the teacher trainees' oral proficiency. The reason for obtaining these data from the teachers too is that they were working closely with the teacher trainees at schools and I strongly felt that getting an opinion other than that of the teacher trainees' lecturers would be useful, because it would give a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. The reason for obtaining this information by using questionnaires was practicality. It would have been too time-consuming and demanding for the teachers to rate the teacher trainees' oral performance during classroom observations. During School-Based Studies the teacher trainees are put in the care of the subject teachers. The teachers have to fulfil a number of duties in support of the teacher trainees, i.e.

- assist in preparing lessons and planning work.
- assess the teacher trainees' teaching competence.
- check attendance, and do other administrative tasks.

They have to fulfil these tasks in addition to their normal workload, consequently they would have been unwilling to observe the teacher trainees in order to rate their oral proficiency as well. The questionnaires were a less time-consuming and less taxing way of getting the teachers' contributions in terms of the teacher trainees' oral proficiency.

I preferred structured questionnaires to unstructured ones for the same reasons as those mentioned above, because I wanted to construct user-friendly questionnaires to ensure a good return rate. I argued that the teachers would be more willing to complete the questionnaires if they were quick and easy to complete.

The constructs of oral proficiency to be rated in the questionnaires were the eight that were rated in the observations -

- (1) Accuracy and fluency: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation,
- (2) Classroom teaching: elicitation, instructions, explanations, level of English,
- (3) Non-verbal communication.

The reasons for selecting these constructs were discussed at length in Chapter 2, where the literature was reviewed.

What follows, is the actual questionnaire that was used. It has a clear instruction at the beginning, and a reminder at the end, to ensure that it is completed correctly.

### **Questionnaire**

#### **Instructions**

Please circle ONE grade only, in terms of the teacher trainees' oral proficiency in each of the questions (1-8) below.

1. How do you rate the teacher trainees' ability to use English language grammatically correct in their classes?
  - A. excellent
  - B. good
  - C. just adequate
  - A. basic
  - E. poor

2. How do you rate the teacher trainees' pronunciation, stress and intonation?
  - A. excellent
  - B. good
  - C. satisfactory
  - D. problematic
  - E. very poor
3. How do you rate the teacher trainees' use of vocabulary?
  - F. excellent
  - G. good
  - H. adequate
  - I. inadequate
  - J. way below acceptable level
4. How do you rate the teacher trainees' ability to elicit learner responses?
  - K. excellent
  - L. good
  - M. average
  - N. basic
  - O. poor
5. How do you rate the appropriacy of the teacher trainees' use of English to the learners' level of English?
  - P. very good
  - Q. always satisfactory
  - R. generally satisfactory
  - S. generally below/above learners' level
  - T. far below/above learners' level
6. How do you rate the teacher trainees' use of instructions in their classroom?
  - U. excellent
  - V. generally good
  - W. just adequate
  - X. not clear
  - Y. completely unsatisfactory

7. How do you rate the teacher trainees' use of NVC in support of their language use?
- A. excellent use
  - A. generally good
  - B. sufficient
  - C. insufficient
  - D. hardly any
8. How do you rate the teacher trainees' use of English to explain concepts, introduce, illustrate, elaborate, summarise?
- E. excellent skills
  - F. good at all the above mentioned
  - G. satisfactory skills
  - H. inadequate
  - I. very undeveloped

MBEC (2000)

**Please Note**

- You should have circled one grade only in each number.
- Please make sure that no answer has been missed out.

### **3.6 Procedures**

#### **ESL Ratings**

The class of twenty teacher trainees selected had been assessed for their ESL oral proficiency in the ECS classes in the first term of 2002, while they were doing their College-Based Studies. The normal procedures of Continuous Assessment were used to rate the teacher trainees' oral performance in a range of informal classroom situations – role play, group discussions, informal interviews or conversations with the ECS teacher educator (myself). The band descriptors for speaking were used for the assessment, and at the end of Term 1 each teacher trainee had been given a grade for his/her oral proficiency in the ECS or ESL classroom.

#### **Structured observations**

In the second term of the academic year, teacher trainees visit schools for their Practice Teaching or School-Based Studies. Teacher trainees are usually placed at different schools according to their subject choices. The twenty participants were placed at nine different schools in Windhoek and their subject lecturers visited them to assess them in Teaching Practice. The teacher trainees taught Mathematics, Science, Accounting, Typing and Social

Studies. I approached some of these teacher educators to rate the oral proficiency of their students during structured observations. The four teacher educators were trained on how to use the bandscales to be administered for the assessment. The rating of the oral proficiency was planned to take place within the first two weeks of the second term so that the two ratings (ESL at College and Practice Teaching at school) should not be too far apart. However, due to various problems, the rating had to be spread over a longer period of time. Major problems that were experienced were the following:

**(1) Transportation problems to school**

Transportation is usually a big problem at our College during the SBS period. Due to their own transportation problems, some lecturers are dependent on College transport during SBS, to drive to school and back to the College. Since various lecturers and different schools are involved, it is difficult to coordinate the transportation, because we only have a few vehicles to take all these lecturers to different schools at different times. This is one of the reasons why lecturers were often late for classes they had to observe at schools, or could not visit the schools at all.

**(2) Time constraints**

The second- and third-year students have their SBS in the second term, while the SBS for the first-years takes place only at the beginning of term 3. Most lecturers teach subjects to more than two year-groups, and some even teach all three year-groups. If a lecturer is responsible for first and third-years, he/she often experiences difficulties in visiting his/her third-year students at schools and still be on time for his/her first-year classes at the College, or to teach his/her first-year classes and still be able to visit schools to observe his/her third-years.

**(3) Internal programmes of schools**

The internal programmes of schools sometimes interfere with SBS visits. Lecturers visit schools at the times that their students present lessons in their subject area, and these times are indicated on timetables submitted to the lecturers by their students. Nonetheless the school timetable is sometimes changed without warning because of an urgent meeting or an extra-curricular activity (Arbor Day or World Aids Day). If a lecturer had planned to visit his/her students on such a day, he/she might not be able to do so, because period times would have changed and most of the times periods would have been shortened.

I had to conduct many of the structured observations myself because the particular teacher educators did not have time to observe some of their students, although they really wanted to. Each of the twenty participants had been observed for two sessions or lesson periods and the duration of each session was 35 to 40 minutes.

### **Questionnaires**

While the teacher educators were observing the teacher trainees, the questionnaires were distributed to the support teachers (or subject teachers) to whom the teacher trainees had been assigned. The rationale behind completion of the questionnaires was explained to the teachers in advance after I had requested their cooperation very politely. I gave questionnaires to the twenty support teachers of the teacher trainees and fourteen were given back to me, i.e. a return rate of 70%, which was quite good.

### **3.7 Analysis**

The analysis of the data was a qualitative analysis on a descriptive level, because qualitative data are described, not explained (Plattner, 2001). The sample size was very small, only twenty participants, therefore the use of statistical procedures or tests was unnecessary.

McDonough and McDonough (1997:53) contend that quantitative data differ from qualitative data, because normative or quantitative data usually require a numerical evaluation, whereas qualitative research gathers data from observations, field data records and questionnaires, among others.

Leedy (1993:142) cautions against regarding the term qualitative as opposite to quantitative. He is of the opinion that it is not true that qualitative research makes no use of quantification. Instead qualitative and quantitative data should be seen as compatible. The difference lies in the predominant form of presentation. Moreover, he states that qualitative data are collected under naturalistic conditions and the data are expressed in language rather than in numerical terms, although quantification can also be done, but to a lesser extent than in quantitative research.

I used tables to encode and compare the data. In the table the twenty participants were indicated by numbers, from one to twenty on a vertical line. Eight columns were then drawn to represent each of the eight constructs measured. The grades A to E were written horizontally on top of each column. The grades each of the participants obtained for each of the eight bandscales were then coded in the columns (See figure 4.2 in Chapter 4). To determine what percentage of the teacher trainees scored excellently (obtained an A), adequately (obtained a C), or below acceptable level (scored a D) for each of the behaviours measured frequency counting was done, as recommended by McDonough and McDonough (1997:106). Simple numerical analysis enabled me to establish what the overall oral proficiency score of the teacher trainees was. The same kind of analysis and description were

done with the data obtained from the questionnaires (Figure 4.3 in Chapter 4). The percentages and grades the teacher trainees obtained in the ESL classroom, observations and questionnaires in different discourse domains were then displayed in additional columns to compare the results (see figures 4.5 and 4.6 in Chapter 4).

### **3.8 SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented the methodological procedures with regard to sampling and collection, and analysis of data. Chapter 4 deals with the results - the tabulation, analysis and discussion thereof.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

In this chapter the data collected are tabulated and analysed. Data were collected from ESL classes at the College, and structured observations of participants during their Practice Teaching, and questionnaires distributed to the subject or support teachers the teacher trainees had been assigned to during their Practice Teaching at schools. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings of the research.

#### 4.1 Tabulation of results

##### Scores for casual conversation

The participants obtained grades for the oral proficiency in ESL or ECS classes during term 1 of their College Based Studies while engaging in informal classroom conversations (See figure 4.1 below). In figure 4.5 the grades for oral proficiency in ESL classes and during Practice Teaching (or School-Based Studies) are displayed. This table makes it possible to compare these two ratings.

**Fig. 4.1 Grades for oral proficiency in ESL classes**

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>GRADE FOR ORAL PROFICIENCY IN ESL CLASS</b>
1.	A
2.	A
3.	B
4.	B
5.	C
6.	C
7.	A
8.	B
9.	B
10.	C
11.	B
12.	C
13.	B
14.	C
15.	C
16.	B
17.	C
18.	B
19.	B
20.	B



**Oral proficiency during Practice Teaching**

The bandscales used for the structured observations were explained and the procedure discussed in the previous chapter. The results obtained from the observations were coded in columns in which all eight bandscales were indicated (See Figure 4.2). Ticks were made to indicate the grade obtained by a participant for each of the constructs of oral proficiency measured. The categories of oral proficiency rated were fluency and accuracy, classroom language and Non-verbal Communication (NVC).

Fig. 4.2. Grades for oral proficiency during Practice Teaching

## BANDSCALES

	FLUENCY AND ACCURACY															CLASSROOM ENGLISH																									
Partici -pants	Grammar					Pronunciation					Vocabulary					Level of English					Elicitations					Instruction					Explanations					NVC					Final Grade
	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E						
1			√				√					√					√				√					√					√					B					
2		√						√				√					√				√					√					√					B					
3			√						√				√					√				√					√					√				C					
4		√					√					√					√					√					√					√				B					
5			√						√					√				√					√					√					√			D					
6			√						√				√					√					√				√					√				D					
7		√					√			√					√				√				√					√					√			B					
8			√				√				√							√					√				√					√				B					
9				√					√					√					√					√				√					√			D					
10			√					√					√						√					√				√					√			C					
11		√				√					√					√					√					√					√					A					
12			√						√				√				√					√					√					√				B					
13		√						√				√				√						√					√					√				C					
14				√					√					√					√					√				√					√			D					
15				√					√				√						√					√				√					√			D					
16			√					√			√							√					√				√					√				C					
17			√					√			√							√					√				√					√				C					
18		√						√			√				√				√				√				√					√				B					
19			√						√			√				√				√				√				√				√				C					
20	√					√					√					√				√				√				√								A					

### Teachers' perceptions of teacher trainees' oral proficiency

Another table (Fig. 4.3 below) was used to tabulate the results of the questionnaires. The eight questions used in the questionnaire were typed vertically and next to each question the grades that the participant could obtain (A to E) were typed horizontally. For each questionnaire, the grades given to the teacher trainees by their support teachers were indicated in the column.

**Fig. 4.3 Results of the questionnaires**

QUESTIONS	A	B	C	D	
1. Grammar		++++			4A's 5B's 4C's 1D
2. Pronunciation		++++	++++		1A 6B's 7C's
3. Vocabulary		++++			3A's 6B's 4C's 1D
4. Elicitation		++++			2A's 6B's 4C's 2D's
5. Level of English		++++			3A's 6B's 3C's 2D's
6. Instructions		++++ ++++			10B's 2C's 2D's
7. N.V.C.		++++	++++		1A 5B's 6C's 2D's
8. Explanations		++++	++++		1A 7B's 6C's
	<u>15</u> 112 = 13,3%	<u>51</u> 112 = 46%	<u>36</u> 112 = 32%	<u>10</u> 112 = 9%	

### 4.2 Analysis of the results

Since the sample size was small – only twenty participants, the use of statistical analysis was unnecessary (See 3.4 – Subjects).

If the sample size were bigger (i.e. more than 30 participants or subjects), I could have used statistical analysis. Leedy (1993:248) argues that we try to understand data from the real world, (e.g. heat, pressure) and from the not-so real world (academic achievement) in statistics by looking closely at, and working with numbers. These data are usually expressed in the form of numbers, e.g. the numerical grade a student scored.

According to Suskie (1992:22), my data are interval data, because I use the letters A, B, C, D and E to give evaluations. Leedy (1993:244) describes interval data as those data measured in difference in standard units. An interval scale provides information about rankings of scores and also indicates the distance between the scores (Nunan 1992:25).

Other types of scales described by Leedy (1993) and Nunan (1992) are nominal scales (measuring exclusive characteristics like sex and eye colour) and ratio scales (that measure absolute values like temperature).

According to the tables presented by Suskie (1992:69-70) for the choice of statistical analysis, I would have used t-tests and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The latter is used for comparing the means of three different ratings. In my study these ratings would be the scores the teacher trainees received for oral proficiency

- (1) in the ESL class,
- (2) during observations in Practice Teaching,
- (3) scores given by their subject teachers when they completed the questionnaires.

To analyse the data obtained from questionnaires from a small number of respondents, or when the sample is small, there is no need for statistical analysis because simple frequency counting can be done. Brown (1990) explains that frequency indicates how many people did the same thing or performed a certain task in the same way. If you were to work out how many received a particular score, say a B for pronunciation, you would count up or tally the number of people who received B's. To calculate the frequency at each score level, the researcher simply tallies them up and records the result (Brown 1990).

Frequencies are useful, because they can be used to summarise information about scores received by a group, as shown in Fig. 4.3. This arrangement of scores in a table is called a frequency distribution, according to Brown (1990).

The data obtained from questionnaires when a large number of respondents completed the questionnaires can be analysed by using the chi-square. This test was used for computing frequencies. Since the chi-square is used to establish if there was a difference between what was expected and what was observed, it can be applied to the data obtained from measuring the oral proficiency of teacher trainees in the two discourse types: conversations and formal teaching. These scores are displayed in Figure 4.5 where ESL ratings represent the expected grades, because casual conversation was measured first, and scores for formal teaching represent the observed graded. In the chi-square test one can establish the significance or non-significance of the difference between the expected grades and the observed grades (Brown 1990:184-185).

If I had been able to use a bigger sample I could also have used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to see what kind of correlation there is between the ratings of casual conversations and the ratings of formal teaching obtained by the participants in my study (Nunan 1992:38).

In statistical analysis graphs can be used for visual presentation of data. Interval data can be displayed in bar graphs. In Appendix 2,3 and 4 the participants' scores are displayed in bar graphs that make comparison of the scores easy.

Suskie (1992:68) states that modern technology simplifies the statistical analysis of a large number of data. A variety of statistical packages are available for the analysis of large numbers of data, and they can be used on large computers or minicomputers. These packages are SPSS, SAS, BMDP and Minitab, amongst others. They are usually easy to use because most of them are self-taught. The writer cautions that analysis done by a consultant may be incomprehensible or overwhelming. The users of the findings should be able to understand them.

#### **Scores for casual conversations**

Simple numerical calculations were done to determine which percentage of the participants performed excellently, quite well, just adequately and below acceptable level in the ESL class, during casual conversations.

#### **Oral proficiency during Practice Teaching**

Frequency counting was done and calculations were made to ascertain which percentage of the teacher trainees passed or failed in terms of each of the constructs measured, e.g. eight participants obtained D's (below acceptable level performance) for elicitation skills, i.e. 40% of the participants did poorly in this area of oral proficiency. A final grade for oral proficiency during Practice Teaching was arrived at by getting the average of the grades obtained for the eight constructs, e.g. Participant I obtained one A, six B's and one C, which gives him/her a final grade of B for oral proficiency. The grades were then recorded against the numbers representing the participants. Thereafter it was clear how to determine the percentages of participants who performed excellently, very well, just adequately and below acceptable level in their oral proficiency during Practice Teaching (See Fig 4.2 and 4.5).

### **Teachers' perceptions of teacher trainees' oral proficiency**

Frequency counting of the ticks in the columns was used to find out how many participants were awarded A's, B's, C's D's and E's for each of the questions in the questionnaires and the percentages were then calculated, e.g. four of the fourteen participants obtained A's for the use of grammar while teaching. This amounts to 28,5 or 29% of the participants.

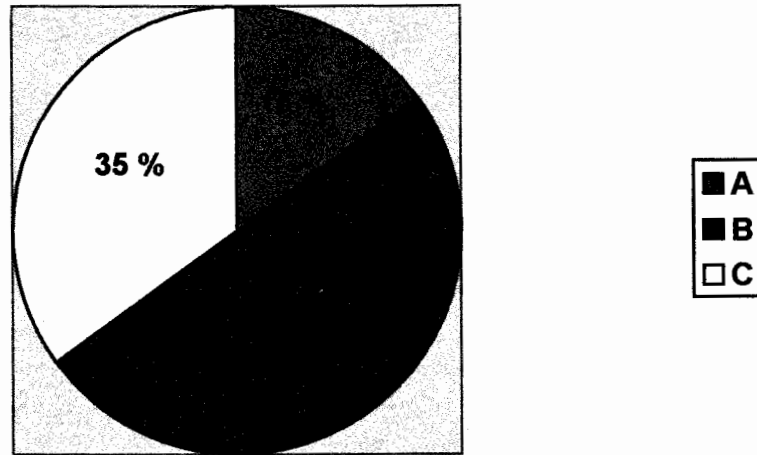
Finally the percentage of teachers awarded A's, B's, C's, D's and E's by their subject teachers was determined in the same way – counting and a numerical calculation (See Figure 4.3). Fourteen respondents (out of the twenty who received the questionnaires) actually completed and returned them. This amounts to 112 (14 x 8) possibilities of A's, B's, C's D's and E's during the assessment.

## **4.3 Discussion of results**

In this section of the report the findings are presented.

### **Scores for casual conversations**

According to the tables in Figures 4.5 and 4.6, fifteen percent of the teacher trainees obtained A's for their oral proficiency in casual conversations, in other words they performed excellently. Fifty percent performed quite well and obtained B's, thirty-five percent of the participants obtained an average grade (C), and none of them performed below an acceptable level. The pie chart (Fig. 4.4 is a visual presentation of the ESL ratings.

**Fig. 4.4 Visual presentation of ESL ratings**

NUMBER OF TEACHER TRAINEES (%)	LETTER GRADES OBTAINED BY TEACHER TRAINEES
15	A
35	B
50	C

### Oral proficiency during Practice Teaching

The summary in Figure 4.6 indicates that 10% of the teacher trainees were rated excellent for their oral proficiency during Practice Teaching; 35% obtained a good grade (B's), 30% could meet the basic requirements (scored C's) and 25% were rated as below acceptable level in their oral proficiency during Practice Teaching.

**Fig. 4.6 Level of proficiency of participants during Practice Teaching and in the ESL classroom**

Level of proficiency	PRACTICE TEACHING		ESL CLASSROOM
	% of teacher trainees - in observation	% of teacher trainees - questionnaires	% of teacher - ESL rating
A. Excellent	10%	13,3%	15%
B. Good	35%	46%	50%
C. Adequate	30%	32%	35%
D. Inadequate	25%	9%	0%
E. Poor	-	-	-

### Accuracy and fluency

In the category of Accuracy and Fluency the findings were:

**Fig. 4.7 Findings for Accuracy and Fluency**

	A	B	C	D	E
Grammar	5%	30%	50%	15%	-
Pronunciation	10%	20%	35%	35%	-
Vocabulary	10%	35%	40%	15%	-

It is evident that 5% of the participants performed excellently in terms of the accuracy of grammar, 30% still made a few errors, 50% used fairly accurate grammar and only made some minor errors and 15% scored poorly for grammatical accuracy because they made serious mistakes.

The findings of the MBEC (2000) study (See Chapter 2) indicated more serious problems for grammatical use among Namibian teachers teaching in primary and junior secondary phases.



For the construct of pronunciation, 10% obtained A grades, 20% did relatively well and obtained B's, 35% performed adequately (average performance) while 35% could not meet the basic requirements for a pass (See Figure 4.7).

In the construct – Vocabulary usage 10% performed excellently, 35% only made a few errors, 40% made adequate use of vocabulary, and 15% used vocabulary inadequately, to the extent that it led to a breakdown in communication.

### **Classroom Language**

The summary below indicates the findings for the second category of oral proficiency – Classroom language.

**Fig. 4.8 Findings for Classroom Language**

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
Elicitations	15%	25%	20%	40%	-
Instructions	15%	35%	35%	15%	-
Explanations	10%	30%	20%	40%	-
Level of English	15%	35%	40%	10%	-

In terms of the teacher trainees' elicitation skills the following findings were recorded:

Fifteen percent of the teacher trainees used English excellently to elicit learner responses, 25 % used English very well to elicit learner responses, 20% used English satisfactorily for elicitation purposes and 40% of the teacher trainees had poor elicitation skills.

Regarding the question on how well the teacher trainees used instructions, the results indicated that 15% used very clear instructions, 35% used clear and sufficient instructions almost all the time, 35% used adequate and clear instructions although they made a few errors of minor consequence. The instructions of 15% of the teacher trainees were not at all clear and sufficient.

Ratings of the teacher trainees' use of English to explain concepts, subject knowledge and procedures revealed that 10% used excellent explanations, introductions and illustrations and 30% used English quite well to explain, introduce and illustrate. English was used quite adequately by 20% of the teacher trainees for the purposes of explaining, introducing and illustrating. However, an alarming percentage, 40% of the teacher trainees could not use English adequately for introductions, explanations of concepts and illustrations. In fact, their explanations were poor.

The results of the MBEC (2000) study regarding explaining concepts were also disappointing for teachers and teacher trainees with 23% of BETD teachers and 17% of teacher trainees performing below acceptable level for explaining concepts. Since this is such a vital skill for classroom teaching urgent measures need to be taken to remedy this problem (See recommendations in chapter 5).

In the study at issue, ratings for the teacher trainees' level of English to the learners' level of English indicated the following: 15% always used English at the correct level for their classes, 35% of the participants used English usually at the correct level for the class; 40% of the teacher trainees used English only sometimes above or below the level of his/her class and for 10% of the teacher trainees the use of English was often above or below that of the class.

If the results regarding the level of English of the study under discussion are compared with the results of the MBEC (2000) study (refer to chapter 2, 2.3, no. 2), the previous study indicated worse results, i.e. that 17% of teacher trainees were "below acceptable level" with regard to their use of English to the learners' level of English. It appears therefore that teachers and teacher educators need to assist teacher trainees in learning how to adjust their language to suit the level of English of their learners.

#### **Non-verbal Communication (NVC)**

For Non-verbal Communication 15% scored excellently, 20% performed pretty well, 20% performed satisfactorily. However, 30% obtained D's and 15% obtained an E grade, in other words, the scores of 45% of the teacher trainees for NVC were less than satisfactory.

**Fig. 4.9 Findings for Non-verbal Communication**

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
<b>NVC</b>	15%	20%	20%	30%	15%

The final grades obtained for oral proficiency indicate that 10% of the participants performed excellently, 35% did well, 30% performed satisfactorily and 25% performed less than satisfactorily.

The scores that stand out very clearly and are cause for concern are the 35% of participants who obtained poor grades (D) for pronunciation; the 40% whose elicitation skills were poor, the 40% whose explanations, illustrations and introductions were inadequate and the 45% whose performance for NVC was very poor. It is evident that the areas of pronunciation, elicitation skills, explaining concepts and the use of NVC are problematic. Moreover, 25% obtained a grade indicating that their oral performance is poor.

Although these results are not conclusive, they should not be disregarded completely.

### **Teachers' perceptions of teacher trainees' oral proficiency**

The subject teachers of the teacher trainees generally gave higher scores to the teacher trainees than their subject lecturers did, for almost all the constructs that were examined during Practice Teaching. Fourteen of the twenty teachers who were requested to complete the questionnaires returned them - a return rate of 70%.

For the constructs of grammatical competence and use of vocabulary, only 7% (respectively) obtained grades below acceptable level. For elicitation skills, level of teacher trainees English to their learners' level, use of instructions and NVC, 14,2% of the participants' grades were less than satisfactory. The scores given to the teacher trainees for pronunciation and explanations were mostly satisfactory and good in some cases, i.e. 14,2% performed excellently for pronunciation and explanations, 46% did relatively well and 46% performed at a satisfactory level.

The conclusion drawn from the questionnaires completed by the teachers is that the teachers are not overly concerned about the teacher trainees' oral proficiency. As a matter of fact, it seems that their perception is that the teacher trainees' oral proficiency is generally good (59,3%), and satisfactory to a certain extent (32%). However, it could well be that they gave scores that they thought were expected, or they did not want to give the impression that they were critical in their perception of the teacher trainees' oral proficiency.

## **4.4 Summary of oral proficiency in different discourse domains**

In Figure 4.6 the oral performance of ESL teacher trainees in different discourse domains is displayed in a way that makes comparison easy.

According to the table, 10% of the teacher trainees performed excellently in the structured observations (Practice Teaching), while 13,3% performed excellently according to the findings of the questionnaires and 15% obtained distinctions during informal discussions in the ESL class.

A good grade (B) was obtained for oral performance by 35%, 46% and 50% in the structured observations (Practice Teaching); according to the questionnaires (Practice Teaching) and in ESL classes respectively. Thirty percent and 32% of the teacher trainees performed at an average level during Practice Teaching according to the findings of the structured observations and the questionnaires, while 35% performed satisfactorily in the ESL class at the College.

Figure 4.6 shows that 25% of the teacher trainees did not perform at an acceptable level according to the results of the structured observations during their Practice Teaching; 10% performed less than satisfactorily according to the findings of the questionnaires, whereas the ESL ratings indicate that none of them obtained a grade below the acceptable level in the ESL class discussions.

On close examination of the results, one may conclude by saying that a difference of oral proficiency across discourse domains is evident. The teacher trainees' oral performance is always better than their performance as rated during Practice Teaching – during observations and by means of questionnaires for the grades A to D. With regard to the final grades for oral performance in the ESL class and oral performance during Practice Teaching the tendency is the same, i.e. a higher grade for oral performance in the ESL class than in Practice Teaching situations. However, there are a few exceptions. Five participants obtained similar grades in the different discourse domains, i.e. 25% and two participants (10%) actually obtained higher grades in the Practice Teaching observations than during the ESL classes.

Nevertheless, an overwhelming 65% of the participants scored better in their oral performance in informal classroom situations in which they were the students than during the Practice Teaching situations when they did the teaching.

It is significant that 25% of the teacher trainees performed below acceptable level during Practice Teaching while none of them obtained a grade below C (a pass) in the ESL class at the College. The findings are in accordance with the hypothesis: ESL teacher trainees' oral proficiency is more satisfactory in some discourse domains, e.g. casual conversations, than in other domains, e.g. classroom teaching.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter the results were tabulated and analysed. Thereafter the results were interpreted and discussed. In the next chapter the contribution of the study will be dealt with. Then the limitations of the study will be explained. Recommendations as to how the problem can be addressed will be discussed and suggestions for further research will be made.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

This is the concluding chapter of the dissertation. It starts with a brief overview of the study. Subsequently, the contributions and limitations of the study are discussed. Finally a few recommendations as to how the problem may be addressed are made as well as a few suggestions for further research.

#### **5.1 Overview**

The main purpose of the study was to test the hypothesis: ESL teacher trainees' oral proficiency is more satisfactory in some discourse domains, e.g. casual conversations, than in others, e.g. classroom teaching. The language problem was explained mostly in terms of the BICS/CALP distinction.

The sample for the study consisted of twenty ESL teacher trainees whose oral proficiency was measured during ESL or ECS classes at the teacher training College and during Practice Teaching classes at schools. The data collection was done by conducting structured observations at schools, by distributing questionnaires to the teachers under whose supervision the teacher trainees were placed at schools and the grades the teacher trainees obtained for the oral performance in ESL classes in the College. Data were described and analysed by means of coding scores in tables, frequency counting and simple numerical calculations. This was possible because of the relatively small sample size of twenty participants. After the data were analysed and interpreted, the findings supported the hypothesis, i.e. the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees is more satisfactory in some discourse domains, e.g. casual conversations, than in others, e.g. classroom teaching.

#### **5.2 Contributions of the study**

##### **Awareness raising**

The study raises awareness about the main research problem. Although the results cannot be regarded as conclusive, as will be explained later in this chapter when the limitations of the study are discussed, the findings do indicate that there is a problem.

The large percentage (25%) of teacher trainees who performed below acceptable level in their oral proficiency during Practice Teaching causes concern, because if the teacher trainees' oral command of English is poor they will not be able to teach effectively.

In terms of accuracy and fluency, the teacher trainees' pronunciation seems to be the major problem. Severe problems in pronunciation can affect teaching negatively if it results in miscommunication. With regard to the classroom English of the teacher trainees, the following problems were detected: 40% had underdeveloped elicitation skills and inadequate skills for the use of English to explain and illustrate concepts, while 45% performed below acceptable level for the use of NVC. Problems in these areas have an adverse effect on teaching because learners will not understand the teacher trainees' explanations and the meaning of their language will not be supported by poor use of NVC.

It is important that teacher educators, principals, teachers at schools and the teacher trainees should be aware of these problems, because only then can they make an effort to address them.

### **Knowledge of the language problem**

The primary research as revealed in the literature review resulted in a discussion of the nature of the language problem. The crux of the matter is that students in general, and in this study the teacher trainees in particular, need special language skills to perform adequately in an academic situation.

In Chapter 2 the language problem was discussed by explaining the BICS/CALP distinction. The distinction clarifies why teacher trainees perform quite satisfactorily in the ESL class at the College when their oral skills are assessed in a supportive, context-embedded and more natural setting when they engage in activities that simulate real-life situations. In these tasks BICS are needed. Nevertheless, when they are the teachers in a more formal and academic setting, i.e. the content subject classroom, their level of achievement drops to the extent that some of them perform poorly. In this situation they need CALP.

An understanding of part of the problem should make teacher educators, principals and teachers at schools involved with the teacher trainees more tolerant towards them and they should think of ways in which to assist them in improving their CALP.

### **Further research**

The results and findings of the study indicate that more in-depth studies about the oral performance of ESL teacher trainees are needed. Since the results of both the MBEC (2000) study and the one under discussion are not conclusive, it is necessary to do more research in order to establish exactly how serious the problem is and identify the specific problematic areas, in order to take measures to solve the problems.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

Since the study under discussion involved small-scale research, there are various limitations that militate against its reliability and validity.

#### **Sampling**

The study was limited to a group of twenty teacher trainees from only ONE of the four teacher training colleges in Namibia, therefore the findings cannot be generalised to include all teacher trainees in the country. The University of Namibia's Education Faculty also trains teachers and the results of this study cannot be generalised to cover these trainees either. The study's external validity is affected, since external validity has to do with the extent to which a study's results can be generalised from samples to populations (Nunan 1992:15). Nevertheless as stated previously, the findings of the study may prompt further and more in-depth research about the problem at issue.

#### **Presence of subject lecturers during observations**

The presence of the subject lecturers in the classes taught by the participants, and the fact that the latter knew that their oral performance was being assessed might have made the situation more stressful to them and could have had an inhibiting influence on their oral performance.

#### **Bandscales**

The instruments used to measure the oral proficiency during the structured observations, i.e. the bandscales, might have interfered with the reliability of the findings, because of the subjective nature of the measuring process, since the bandscales lend themselves to differences in interpretation.

Whereas the construct validity of the study should not have been under threat as the constructs measured were clearly defined in the bandscales, there might have been variations in the interpretation of the bandscales, seeing that several lecturers were involved in conducting the observations and assessing the oral proficiency of the participants. There might have been problems regarding the inter-rater reliability of the study (MBEC 2000:6). Inter-rater reliability (according to Weller 1985, in Labarca & Bailey 1985) refers to “the extent to which two or more raters assign scores that tend to vary together when rating similar kinds of performance”. It was also suggested earlier (in Chapter 3) that the closeness provided by observations can lead to biases that may affect the researchers’ objectivity (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:162). However, practical and logistical problems made it necessary to involve the subject lecturers of the teacher trainees in the study.

### **Structured questionnaires**

Structured questionnaires were used to make them more user-friendly to the respondents in order to assure a good return rate, and while this has been achieved (the return rate was 70%), the fact that only checks were given in these questionnaires make the findings less useful. There was a noticeable discrepancy between the scores given by the teacher trainees’ support teachers who completed the questionnaires, and the scores given by their subject lecturers during the observations. The teachers’ scores were higher for all the constructs measured. In structured questionnaire no explanations are given. The findings of the questionnaires, therefore do not give any explanations for the scores given by the teachers. One can infer that the teachers gave scores they thought they were expected to give, and in such a case the internal reliability of the study is under threat. On the other hand, the following question immediately arises: Were the subject lecturers too strict in their assessment of the teacher trainees’ oral proficiency?

## **5.4 Recommendations on how to address the problem**

### **5.4.1 Background information**

After a close look at the findings of the study it was necessary to research what strategies are employed at improving the command of English of teacher trainees at the four teacher training colleges and the University of Namibia, before recommendations could be made as to how the problem should/could be addressed.



### **ECS at the Colleges**

The ECS course offered at the four teacher training colleges in Namibia to first-, second- and third-year teacher trainees have the following aims:

“ to equip students with the language proficiency needed both for their studies and for teaching through the medium of English, and to empower them to work cooperatively and independently in the continuing development of their knowledge, skills and attitudes” (NIED 2000:3).

This ECS course is a general language improvement course, and while tremendous effort is put into creating an atmosphere conducive to learning the target language by using activities that simulate the outside world, some areas of the course are neglected. The major reason for this is a very wide and comprehensive curriculum hampered by time constraints. The total credit points for ECS over three years of study are eight. These points amount to 360 hours over three years of study, which is not enough to cover the syllabus.

Although the ECS lecturers were told that they could use more time if needed and if they so wished, the teacher trainees' time-tables are so full that it will be very hard to schedule more periods for ECS, and the time available is not adequate to cover the syllabus thoroughly.

The ECS syllabus makes provision for the teaching and practice of English for school, including elicitations, giving instruction, speaking and reading, social interaction in school, explaining, simplifying and amplifying language of subject texts, reading a text aloud in the second term of the second year.

### **University Core English (UCE) and the University Core Academic (UCA) course**

The University of Namibia (Unam) offers two English upgrading courses to first-year students. The UCE course is offered in the first semester of the first year. All first-year students who wrote the International General Certificate of Secondary Education have to enroll for this course. They need to have a C symbol for English to be admitted to the University. Only Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education students with a good pass for English in Grade 12 are exempted from the first-semester course. The students write an exam for the UCE course at the end of the semester 1.

Thereafter, only if they passed the UCE course they have to enroll for the UCA course. This is an English course for academic purposes, which comprises modules in Academic reading, writing, speaking and listening. Unfortunately this course is also very general and aims at enhancing general English skills and study skills to help students cope in their academic subjects.

Student teachers at the University receive very little support (in this course) for coping in the classroom teaching situation. The only oral practice they receive is a few short oral presentations that they have to do after doing research in a topic related to their major subject area. They do not receive any practice in classroom language skills (Willemse 2002).

Starfield (1992:4) reports on how attempts were made at the University of the Witwatersrand to improve the Academic Support Programme (ASP) when it failed to solve the language problems of the students. She states that the lecturers involved realised that they needed to devise a programme that could facilitate the CALP acquisition of their students.

### **Intensive courses**

The University of Ohio, in Athens Ohio in the U.S.A, offers a six-week summer school to teachers of English as a second language on an annual basis. The course is called the Ohio Programme of Intensive English (OPIE) – a six-week programme that runs from Monday to Friday between 08:00 and 17:00. The participants are exposed to a great deal of literature about teaching and research strategies, materials development, approaches to language teaching, and more. The course is very intensive and demanding, but also very rewarding.

Schrade (1992) recommends an institute of oral proficiency and teaching effectiveness for practising secondary Spanish and French teachers. A close study of her model reveals that the classes presented to the teachers focused on pronunciation, intonation, everyday expressions, question asking and answering, study of syntax, word choice, meanings and appropriateness of style. In Schrade's (1992:1) study results of pre- and post-Institute oral interviews showed that the proficiency of all the participants improved after a four-week intensive programme. This was also an in-service programme for teachers held in the holidays. Native speaker tutors in small classes instructed the participants. Through controlled practice, large amounts of structured language used in the real world, were practised for several hours in a day.

### **5.4.2 Recommendations**

- More time needs to be spent on the teaching and practising of English for schools in the ECS classes at the College, than on engaging in casual conversations, which the teacher trainees clearly do not have difficulties with.

- Classroom language could be dealt with in the teacher trainees' second year, in term 1, before they visit schools for Practice Teaching, and should be revisited before SBS in the third year.
- More time should be allocated to ECS in all three year-groups, and this will have to be stipulated in the Broad Curriculum of the BETD.
- Rigorous strategies will have to be employed to enhance the teacher trainees' CALP, seeing that they need this to cope in the more formal and academic situation of classroom teaching.
- Both the MBEC (2000:79) report and the Report of the Presidential Commission (1999:79-80) suggest that the required entry grade for English to a teacher training programme should be raised to a D or C. The present requirement is an E.
- English improvement programmes for students at universities (or colleges for that matter), should be closely related to the demands made on students in their major field of study, and both language and subject specialists should be involved in collaborative teaching (Starfield 1992:4&5).
- Another recommendation is to follow examples of universities that offer intensive courses to upgrade the English of qualified teachers who struggle to teach effectively because of an inadequate command of English. Similar types of English upgrading courses could be run by the colleges and the university to give assistance to teachers of content area subjects who teach through the medium of English, to raise the level of competence in English in all areas, but particular emphasis should be placed on those areas identified as problematic in the research studies.
- Programmes like the one suggested by Schrade (1992), although meant for language teachers, can be adapted to meet the needs of teachers of content subjects who teach through the medium of English.
- The National Institute of Educational Development (NIED) in Namibia should look closely into the matter of improving the command of English among Namibia's teachers and teacher trainees, because representatives of NIED were part of the MBEC (2000) study and the investigation done by the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (1999). Recommendations made in these studies, were among others, that "the importance of proficiency in English language is a matter of urgency, since progress in education requires such proficiency" (Report of the Presidential Commission: 1999:80), and "very serious measures should be taken to

address the problem of a poor command of English among Namibia's teachers and teacher trainees" (MBEC 2000).

### **Specific suggestions from the MBEC (2000) report**

A number of suggestions are made in the MBEC (2000) report of which I support the following.

- Advisory teachers should be trained to be of assistance in the area of English across the curriculum so that they can give support to their subject teachers (MBEC 2000:80).
- Language upgrading can be done by means of direct face-to-face courses presented by experts in the target language and methodology of appropriate subjects. The teachers will then have to enroll in these classes. The downside of this is that such courses are usually expensive (MBEC 2000:75).
- Another option is an INSET Language improvement programme. Such a programme may have two different components: A direct contact course or session as well as a distance component. The Report of the Presidential Commission (1999:83-84) gives a lengthy explanation about the structure of such a course, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### **5.5 Suggestions for further research**

The present study was an investigation into the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees across discourse domains. The findings of the study indicated that there is a difference in the oral performance of ESL teacher trainees across discourse domains – they seem to perform better in casual conversations than in more formal practice teaching situations.

Nevertheless, the results of the study cannot be regarded as conclusive because of the limitations already discussed in this chapter. Subsequently, to increase and augment the relevance of the study the following suggestions for further research are made.

#### **Sampling**

The study should include participants – teacher trainees from the entire population - and that will be the four teacher training colleges in Namibia and from the University of Namibia and other teacher training programmes, e.g. BETD In-service Teacher Training

and Open Learning Group, Namibia. This should be done to make the findings relevant and generalisable to all teacher trainees in the country.

### **Randomisation**

More attention and care should be given to the random selection of participants so that characteristics like native language, cultural background, age, gender, major subject area and educational background of each unit of the sample approximate the characteristics of the population (Leedy 1997:205).

### **Instruments used**

#### **(a) Observation bandscales**

Bandscales were used to measure the oral performance of the participants. The bandscales need to be refined to make them more sophisticated in an attempt to eliminate subjective interpretation by the raters. Simultaneously, to avoid a threat to the inter-rater reliability, joint assessment should be done by the data collectors (or raters) involved. In other words, two raters would have to observe and rate the oral proficiency of the same participant(s), and they will then have to reach consensus about the final score to be given to the participant(s).

#### **(b) Unstructured questionnaires**

To prevent problems of unreliable data obtained from the questionnaires, unstructured questionnaires should be used. It will then be possible to analyze the responses given by the respondents, because they have to explain, or elaborate on their answers. Such responses are much more useful than the simple checks given in instructed questionnaires.

On the other hand, respondents are sometimes reluctant to complete a structured questionnaire because it is rather time-consuming. To ensure a good return rate of the questionnaire they will have to be distributed to a large number of respondents, and these respondents need to be sensitised about the rationale behind the study so that they can be motivated to complete and return the questionnaires. A poor return rate of the questionnaires makes the data less reliable and relevant.

It is advisable to pilot the questionnaires before the actual study to make sure that the questions asked are the correct ones for eliciting the desired information.

**(c) Interviews**

Questionnaires could also be replaced by interviews conducted with the support teachers of the teacher trainees. Thorough planning will have to be done, because interviews need to be well thought through and properly prepared beforehand. Preparation includes careful drafting of interview questions, preparation of instruments like tape recorders, and appointments with interviewees.

**5.6 Summary**

In this concluding chapter of the dissertation, Chapter 5, an overview of the study was given. Thereafter, the contributions of the study – awareness raising, knowledge of the language problem and further research were discussed. These were followed by an exposition of the limitations the study had regarding sampling, threats to inter-rater reliability and problems with instrumentation. Recommendations were made on how to address the problem of a poor command of English among ESL teacher trainees and Namibian teachers.

These recommendations entailed Communication Skills courses taught at the Colleges and University, Intensive courses and other ideas. In terms of suggestions for further research a close look at the following is necessary: sampling, randomisation and the instruments to be used.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

**QUESTIONNAIRE:        THE ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ESL TEACHER  
                                 TRAINEES IN DIFFERENT DISCOURSE DOMAINS**

**RESPONDENTS:         SUPPORT TEACHERS**

I am a teacher educator at the Windhoek College of Education doing research about the oral proficiency of BETD student teachers. The support teachers of the students at the schools where they do their SBS observe their lessons and work closely with them. Your perceptions of their oral proficiency will therefore make an invaluable contribution towards a study of this nature.

I would appreciate it if you could complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me as soon as possible. All the information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will be used for educational purposes only. I promise to send you a short abstract of the major findings of the study if you are interested.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

C.E. Olivier

**Windhoek College of Education**

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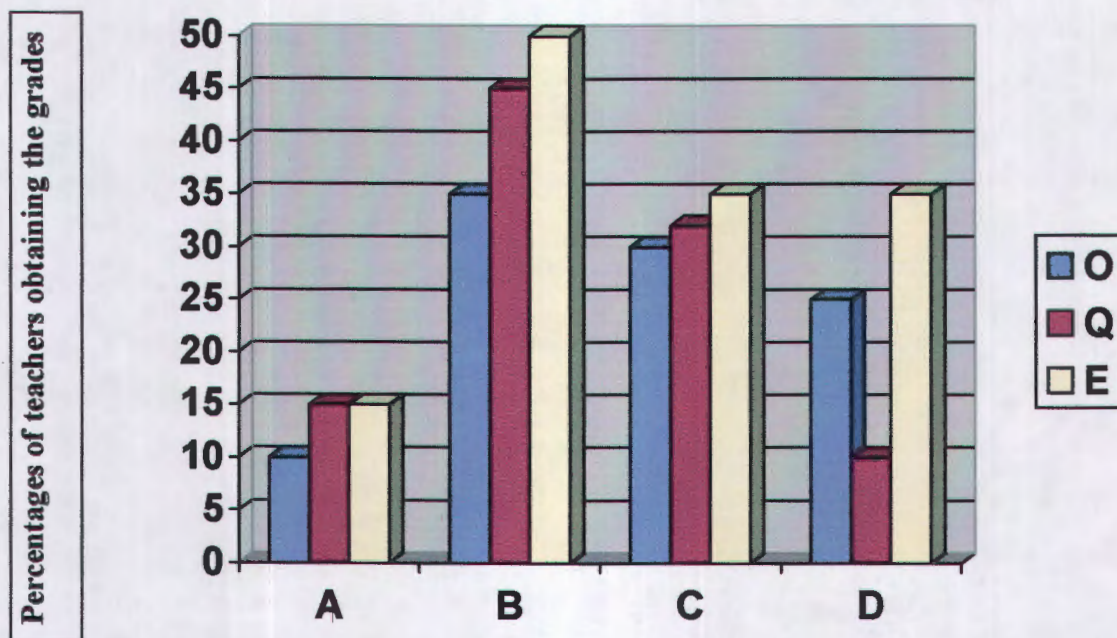
I would appreciate it if you could complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me as soon as possible. All the information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will be used for educational purposes only. I promise to send you a short abstract of the major findings of the study if you are interested.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

C.E. Olivier

**Windhoek College of Education**

## APPENDIX 2 - LEVEL OF ORAL PROFICIENCY

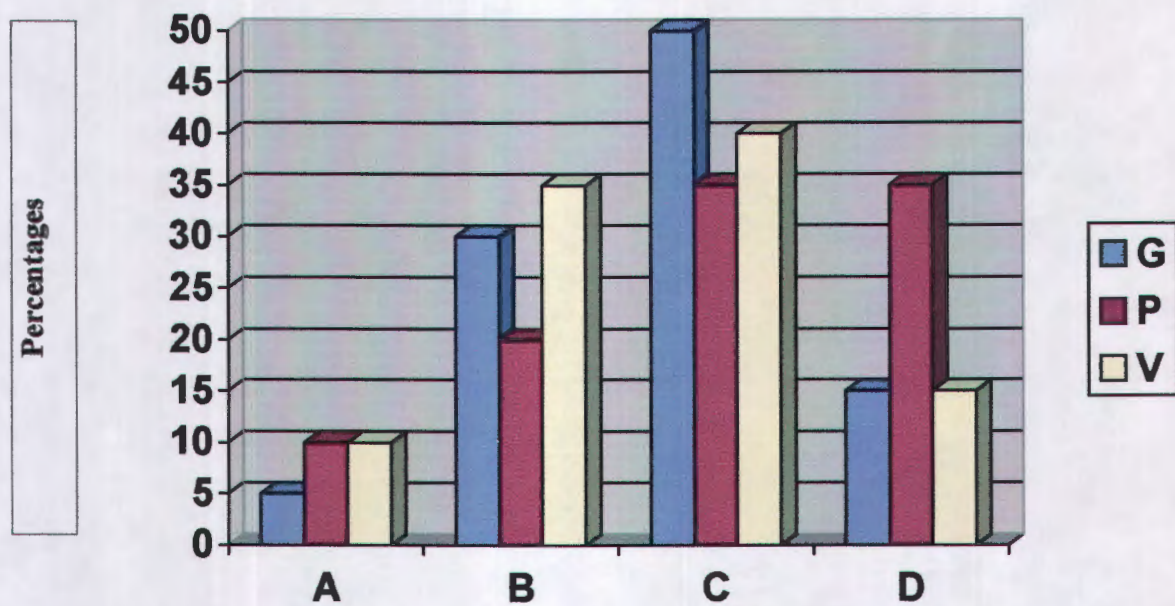


Observations - O

Questionnaires - Q

ESL - E

### APPENDIX 3 – SCORES FOR ACCURACY AND FLUENCY



#### ACCURACY & FLUENCY

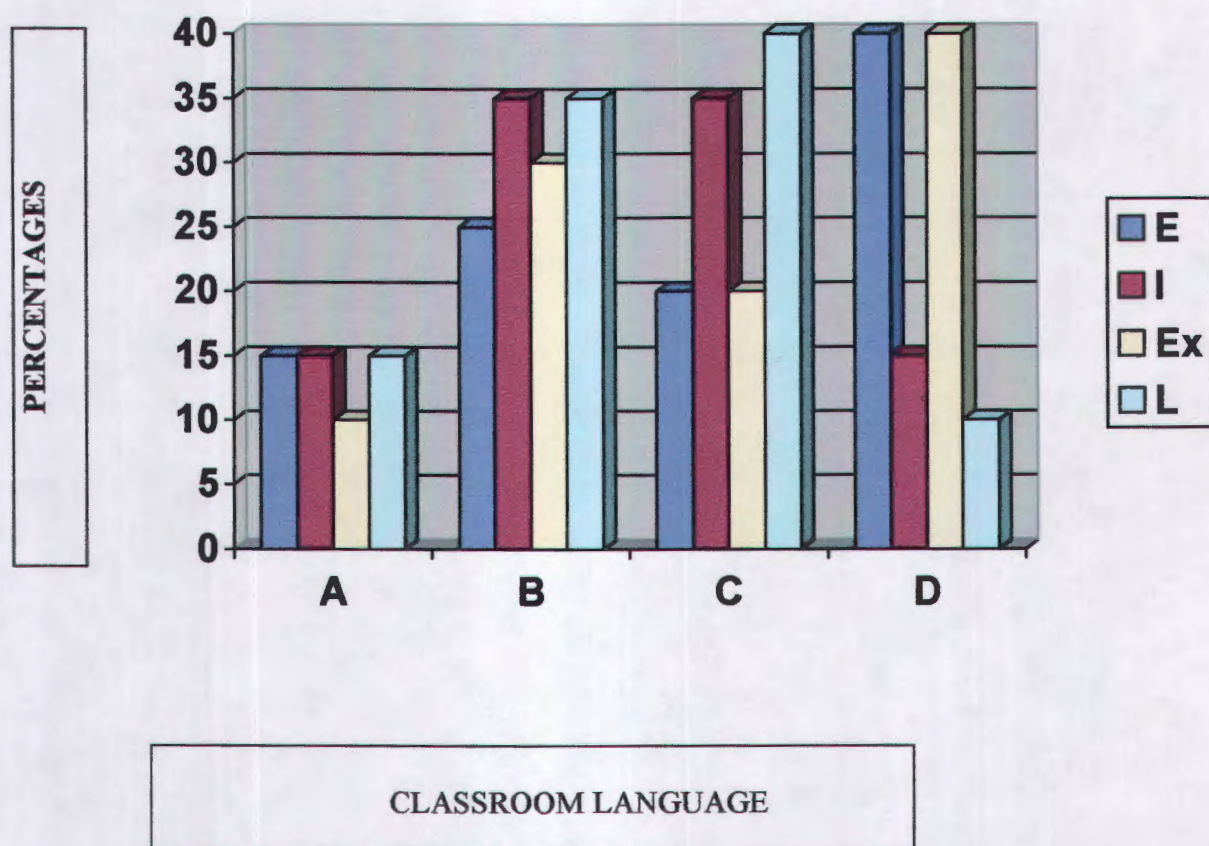
Grammar - G

Pronunciation - P

Vocabulary - V



#### APPENDIX 4 – SCORES FOR CLASSROOM LANGUAGE



Elicitation - E

Instructions - I

Explanations - Ex

Level of English - L