

BEYOND PAPER-AND-PENCIL TESTS: GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICES FOR EFL CLASSES

SANDY T. SOTO / EDER INTRIAGO PALACIOS / JOHNNY VILLAFUERTE HOLGUÍN



Beyond Paper-and-Pencil Tests: Good Assessment Practices for EFL Classes

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Primera edición en inglés, 2018

Este texto ha sido sometido a un proceso de evaluación por pares externos con base en la normativa editorial de la UTMACH

Ediciones UTMACH

Gestión de proyectos editoriales universitarios

209 pag; 22X19cm - (Colección REDES 2017)

Título: Beyond Paper-and-Pencil Tests: Good Assessment Practices for EFL Classes. / Sandy T. Soto / Eder Intriago Palacios / Johnny Villafuerte Holguín (Coordinadores)

ISBN: 978-9942-24-111-5

Publicación digital

Título del libro: Beyond Paper-and-Pencil Tests: Good Assessment Practices for EFL Classes.

ISBN: 978-9942-24-111-5

Comentarios y sugerencias: editorial@utmachala.edu.ec

Diseño de portada: MZ Diseño Editorial

Diagramación: MZ Diseño Editorial

Diseño y comunicación digital: Jorge Maza Córdova, Ms.

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Km. 5 1/2 Vía Machala Pasaje

www.utmachala.edu.ec

Machala - Ecuador

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Dedication

To all the people who made the publication of this book possible.

To those EFL teachers who, day by day, give the best of their own for helping their students construct their knowledge and learn English in meaningful and effective ways.

Introduction

Individuals' learning of a second or foreign language has been traditionally measured with paper-and-pencil tests. Unfortunately, such assessment practice prevents learners from demonstrating the skills gained throughout the teaching-learning processes and thus, their actual ability to use the target language effectively. It also limits learners from receiving positive feedback; which opens doors for them to improve their language skills.

The language teaching field demands that English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers have a vast knowledge of the fundamental concepts and theories that surround the assessment of EFL learning. It also requires that professionals who teach a foreign language keep up to date with assessment tendencies that go beyond paper-and-pencil tests as is the case of authentic assessments.

Assessment practices that go beyond traditional paper-and-pencil tests provide students with opportunities to be assessed in mental stress-free environments. Teachers who promote this alternative form of assessment prompt learners to perform real-world tasks so that they can demonstrate their capability to apply essential knowledge and skills in creative and meaningful ways. In other words, teachers gain insights about how much students have grasped by

their actual ability to perform in a specific situation instead of the number right or wrong answers they have made on a test.

This book is composed of seven chapters intended to inform pre-service and in-service EFL teachers about good assessment practices that go beyond the bounds of tests that require learners to read questions and respond in writing. The first chapter of this book provides EFL educators with a menu of authentic assessments that can be implemented in their classrooms. It also builds a synopsis of assessment practices in Ecuadorian EFL classes and the educational policies that have been implemented to improve them.

The second chapter of this book digs into the use of role-plays as an alternative to assess students' oral production. The chapter is built upon the results of two studies on the topic and some research conducted by its author, addressing the causes that affect learners' willingness to speak English. The third chapter focuses on the assessment of one of the receptive skills in language learning, reading. This chapter offers a compilation of resources for effectively assessing reading comprehension in EFL programs; detailing how these resources intertwine with the reality of EFL settings.

The fourth chapter discusses a set of strategies that have been evaluated by the authors of this section through action research. Based on their experience, the authors explain how such strategies can be used as tools to gain insights, develop reflective practice, and improve students' outcomes as well as the teaching environment.

In the fifth chapter, the readers will learn about the importance of determining and how to diminish students' test anxiety. This chapter also addresses practical authentic assessment tools and scenarios that give language learners anxiety-free opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge.

The sixth and seventh chapters have been devoted to the use of technology for assessing language learners authentically. Chapter six analyzes the change from traditional pen

and paper tests to those that have incorporated technology. The authors review the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies based evaluation and assessment applications for English as foreign language learning and teaching, as well as their advantages and disadvantages, current developments, and future trends for technology-based assessment practices.

Finally, grounded in an action research intervention, chapter seven examines how the use of Literature Circles, Google Apps, and corrective feedback can help students improve learners' English language level. Each chapter in this book offers EFL teachers with valuable information on good assessment practices. It is expected that the educators who read this work consider the suggestions provided here and implement them in their practice. We are sure that by doing so, these educators will give their students the possibility of being assessed authentically; it is to say, by what they can do instead of by how many items they get right on a test.

01 Chapter Authentic assessment of EFL students in Ecuadorian classrooms: What teachers need to know! Be a better teacher, assess authentically!

Hamilton Quezada; Sandy T. Soto

Abstract

Assessment practices in EFL settings have been traditionally designed as paper-and-pencil tests. This exercise has provided students limited opportunities to be appraised and receive feedback based on their actual performance of the language in authentic situations; such is the case of the educational framework of Ecuador and other countries with similar contexts. From the perspective of the Ecuadorian reality, this work is intended to provide Ecuadorian and other EFL educators with possible recommendations to implement authentic assessments in EFL classrooms. This chapter

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provides a synopsis of assessment in EFL classes in Ecuador and the educational policies that have been recently implemented to regulate and improve its practice.

Grounded in an exhaustive literature review of the works done by the precursors of authentic assessments, the work presents a menu of performance-based assessment tasks and suggestions about how implementing them to assess students' linguistic skills, as an alternative to the traditional tests. These approaches will serve as a model for EFL teachers who are willing to enlist in new evaluation endeavors, get out of their comfort zone, and take risks to become better teachers.

Keywords: authentic assessment, performance-based assessment, assessment practices, EFL, Ecuador.

Introduction

Imagine an EFL classroom in Ecuador in which you are given two options to assess your students. The first is the application of a traditional paper-and-pencil test whereas the second is assigning students to perform an interview. Which assessment option do you think would be more likely to provide you with authentic evidence of students' learning? It all depends on what the assessment goals are. It is certainly easy to assume that if the goals are communicative, then the interview is the best choice to assess students' learning progress. As stated by Nitko and Brookart (2007), assessment is a wide term that refers to the obtainment of data used to decide, among others, about students, teaching practice, and the curriculum of a particular subject. It can also be said that assessment of students' learning is a controversial and even delicate area. This is supported by what Pratt (1994) suggested about assessment, indicating that "assessment is an area that often produces tension between teachers and students" (p. 127).

Therefore, considering Pratt's view about assessment and stressing what Nitko and Brookhart asserted, it is important that educators reflect upon how they can collect that data by having their students work on more authentic and meaningful activities than completing quizzes, questionnaires, and taking traditional paper-and-pencil tests. Unlike standardized tests, which according to Abedi (2010) are "conducted mainly for accountability purposes [and ...] do not afford an opportunity for students to present a comprehensive picture of what they know and can do ..." (p. 1), several authors agree upon the idea that authentic assessment is the assessment of students' learning by providing students the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom within activities that resemble real-life like situations and demonstrate their innovative abilities (Herrera, Morales & Murry, 2013; Lacy, 2002; McMillan, 1997; Nitko & Brookhart, 2007; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1993).

Regarding assessment, evaluation of student progress practices in Ecuador has been mostly tied to non-authentic assessments such as traditional summative paper-and-pencil tests, quizzes, and homework. Therefore, from the perspective of the Ecuadorian reality, this chapter is intended to provide Ecuadorian and other English as a foreign language (EFL) educators with feasible recommendations to implement authentic assessments in EFL classrooms. Authentic assessments can provide EFL teachers with a plethora of benefits when tracking students' learning progress. These benefits include giving students the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned by performing activities that they can connect to situations performed in real life.

Recommendations on how to grade authentic assessments through rubrics and checklists are also provided. These suggestions complement each other. Therefore, they will provide EFL teachers with a concrete research-based rationale for the purpose of implementing authentic assessments in their classroom as well as how to grade these types of assessments. The next part provides a detailed explanation of the structure and organization of this chapter. This will highlight the main topics discussed and its components.

This work includes three main sections. The first section contains the definition of the problem. In this part, the authors have made an analysis of the issues in assessment in Ecuadorian classrooms. According to the authors' experience, there is a limited authentic assessment in EFL teachers' instruction in Ecuador. As a matter of fact, even though there have been changes to the Ecuadorian Law of Education (*Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural-LOEI*) in regards to assessment, a great number of EFL teachers continue using traditional paper-pencil tests (midterm tests and final exams), quizzes, questionnaires and homework as the main means to assess and measure their students' learning progress. Consequently, students are still not being provided with authentic tasks when their linguistic skills and learning progress are assessed.

In the second section, approaches that the former Ecuadorian government implemented in terms of assessment are discussed. Those approaches reflect changes in the bylaws of the Ecuadorian Law of Education (*Reglamento a la Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural - LOEI*). The LOEI contemplates three types of students' evaluation within its new regulations, 1. Diagnostic, 2. Formative and 3. Summative. In regards to formative assessment, the LOEI establishes that this type of assessment "[W]ill take place during the learning process in order to allow the teacher to make adjustments to the teaching methodology, and keep education stakeholders informed on the progress of achieved partial results in the integral development of the student" (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador, 2012, p. 195). Therefore, Ecuadorian EFL educators must be aware that the role of assessment goes beyond a final test. It is an ongoing process of monitoring student progress throughout the teaching/learning process that helps them become informed about the results of their teaching practice and student learning.

The late major event regarding EFL teaching in Ecuador has been the launch of Project Advance which includes the National English Curriculum Guidelines, Ecuadorian in-service English teacher standards-the English Language Lear-

ning Standards, and Assessment Suggestions. In regards to teaching, this project aligned the Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards to the standards of the Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages most commonly known as TESOL. According to Project Advanced, within the assessment domain, the most important indicators state that teachers should be knowledgeable about and able to use a variety of assessment procedures for students. Use performance-based assessment tools and tasks (e.g., portfolios, projects, classroom observations, checklists, reading logs, video, and spreadsheet software) that measure students' progress. Use a variety of rubrics to assess students' language developments in classroom settings. (Equipo Técnico de Proyecto de Ingles, 2012, p. 6)

Consequently, with these standards, Ecuadorian EFL teachers have been required to incorporate multiple assessment options and appropriate grading tools in their instruction. These options include tasks that require learners to perform in ways that go beyond paper-and-pencil tests and the use of rubrics and/or checklists to assess that performance and linguistic skills.

Another important document for this work is the Assessment Suggestions document. This document explicitly provides tips for teachers in order to improve their assessment practices. Several suggestions are very specific, especially in regard to testing construction. In terms of the speaking skill, teachers "should concentrate on item types that test for real-life situations. For example, instead of tests of reading aloud or telling stories, questions should test students' ability to understand and respond appropriately to such things as polite requests, directions, instructions, advice, etc." (Villalba, 2012, p. 4). These recommendations encourage teachers to aim their student assessment practice for communication purposes. They require EFL educators to have learners demonstrate the improvement of their linguistic skills in situations that resemble real contexts.

In the third section of the chapter, the authors provide recommendations for EFL teachers to deal with issues stated in the statement of the problem section. Aware of the existing gaps in regards to authentic assessment practices in Ecuadorian EFL classes as well as the alignments set by Project Advance for EFL teachers, the authors of this work have proposed two research-based suggestions for Ecuadorian EFL educators. The first suggestion is the implementation of performance-based assessments which include hands-on activities, projects, role-plays, and any other tasks that would connect students to real-life situations. The second recommendation has to do with the use of checklists and rubrics to provide a more accurate and objective grading of students' work.

Since research shows evidence about their positive results and effectiveness in the assessment of second and foreign language learning, the authors believe that the implementation of these strategies and techniques would provide Ecuadorian EFL teachers and EFL teachers from similar contexts a canvas of opportunities to authentically assess students. Furthermore, they could also be used as an alternative to summative assessment which can help to change the picture of assessment of students' progress that still is portrayed within EFL classes today. In the next section, we detail background information about assessment practices in the Ecuadorian context.

Definition of the Problem

Students' Assessment in Ecuador: A Brief Background

Ecuadorian education has been forgotten for many years. The former president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, repeatedly stated that education in Ecuador had been a "social fraud" (Canal 7 de Ecuador TV Pública, 2012). That is because many of his predecessors were not concerned about how the quality of education impacts the progress of the nation. As a consequence, education was neglected, and investment in

it was relatively limited. This issue brought several repercussions that affected what happened inside the public-school classrooms. One of these repercussions was reflected in the way students' learning has been assessed for many years. The overall nature of students' assessment was traditionally non-authentic. Teachers mostly focused on quantitatively measuring students' progress within a study term through mid-term tests and final exams. These tests and exams were accompanied with homework grading, quizzes, and questionnaires. However, students' knowledge about any subject was mainly determined by a number, which was gathered through traditional teacher created paper-pencil tests.

Assessment Reality

According to the authors' experience, in their roles as educators in Ecuador, there is limited authentic assessment practice in EFL teachers' instruction. As participant observers, we have observed that a substantial number of EFL teachers are still using homework, questionnaires, and the old-fashioned paper-and-pencil tests as the only way to assess and measure their students' improvement. This means that Ecuadorian EFL teachers have based their assessment practice on the Grammatical Approach. According to Richards & Rodgers (1986), the Grammatical Approach bears in the idea that second language learning happens as a result of repetition and drills. Assessment in that context requires students to memorize, repeat, fill in blanks, and complete sentences. Consequently, students are not provided with authentic tasks to demonstrate their linguistic skills and learning progress.

The data teachers obtain from these types of assessments typically measures students' knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, reading, and sometimes listening, leaving the assessment of students' speaking skills aside. It means that through these usually teacher-made tests or assignments, EFL teachers are not assessing all the linguistic skills of their students properly. Moreover, all students are assessed under the same rules without taking into account their differences and individual needs. At this point, it is important to mention

that unlike the new educational law, the previous one did not differentiate students' assessment as formative and summative within its regulations. Instead, it referred to assessment as a whole. Similarly, unlike the specifications provided in the assessment indicators for English and other subjects, the old educational law of Ecuador did not promote the implementation of authentic assessment practices to assess students' progress. That is the reason why when it came to assessing students' learning, teachers only applied traditional assessment methods, which in the case of EFL was grammar-based approach methods. Since EFL teachers have used these types of assessments for a long time, they have adopted them as their main way of assessing students.

Regrettably, regardless of the purpose of the assessment either formative or summative, in the authors' experience, just like in the past, assessment of Ecuadorian students' progress today reveals limited authenticity. What has been really happening in Ecuadorian classrooms shows a notorious absence of authenticity within these assessments. Furthermore, since authentic formative assessment is a new approach to Ecuadorian education, there are still several misconceptions about its purpose and appropriate implementation. Although educators try to put somehow into practice this new assessment trend, there is still an evident mismatch between those intentions and what formative assessment is. Likewise, when they refer to summative assessment, they mostly associate it with the traditional paper-and-pencil test without taking into account other forms of authentic assessments.

Currently, teachers are facing challenges regarding students' assessment practices. This is due to the transition that the Ecuadorian education is going through which is a result of a total restructuring of the educational system in Ecuador. These changes in education have been claimed as the "Educational Revolution" of President Rafael Correa (Ministerio de Educación, 2010). One of the elements that have been restructured as a result of this Educational Revolution has to do with a change in the curriculum for the English subject. The

new curriculum for EFL classes in Ecuador has a communicative focus, which requires that teachers promote the development of students' communicative skills (Villalba & Rosero, 2012). Students are expected to develop their communicational skills to use them in real English speaking settings. Accordingly, the communicative approach has become the cornerstone of the curriculum for this subject. Sadly, many Ecuadorian EFL teachers are still using grammar-based instruction and evaluations in their teaching practice.

This is reflected in what Scoggin (2011) claimed about students learning assessment. In his work Scoggin (2011) stated that

[A]lthough educators are making growing efforts to improve their teaching in order to optimize meaningful student learning, assessment strategies remain unchanged. For example, despite the fact that there is a tendency for learning to become more active, the assessment remains focused on written tests characterized by the passivity of the student, temporary memorization of decontextualized information, the fear that it produces in students, and more importantly, a poor reflection of meaningful learning. In summary, the separation between the teaching and learning process and assessment prevents even the best methodology to have the desired effect (p. 5).

In our experience as participant observers, we claim that the current students' assessment implemented in EFL classrooms is not aligned with the communicative approach. This results in a mismatch of the curriculum and what Ecuadorian EFL teachers are actually doing in their practice. Assessments in Ecuadorian public high schools are still being conducted under the concept of paper-pencil tests. EFL students are not prompted to complete assessment tasks that would lead them to develop their communicational skills authentically or to develop authentic products as a result of their administration.

Current Approaches

Approaches for Foreign Language Teaching in Ecuador

In Ecuador, English has been taught in a traditional way. In the authors' experience, the grammatical approach has been the dominant method in Ecuadorian EFL classes. This second language teaching/learning approach is based on the idea that for acquiring a second language, individuals need to learn grammatical rules and patterns. (Herrera & Murry, 2011; Macaro, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Richards & Rogers, 1986). Teachers, therefore, are to provide explicit instruction of grammar rules. EFL teachers do not necessarily need to speak the language but be knowledgeable about its grammar. According to the former president of Ecuador Rafael Correa Delgado, the reality in Ecuadorian public schools is that by the end of their six years of high school instruction, Ecuadorian students were unable to speak the English language (Canal 7 de Ecuador TV Pública, 2012). That was the result of the teaching approach and methods that have been applied in Ecuadorian EFL classes for years and the low proficiency level of the language (Canal 7 de Ecuador TV Pública, 2012). Aware of this issue, the former Ecuadorian government intended to move EFL teaching towards a communicative focus (Villalba & Rosero, 2012). Unlike the grammatical approach, the communicative is framed in a different perspective. Learning a second language happens as a result of interaction indirectly (Herrera & Murry, 2011; Macaro, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Richards & Rogers, 1986). According to these authors, students need to use the language for communication and master grammatical functions. That is what the former Ecuadorian government expected from students to achieve with the new curriculum (Villalba & Rosero, 2012).

The New Regulations for Student Assessment

Education in Ecuador has been neglected for years. The previous law of education of Ecuador was decreed in 1983 (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, n.d.; Ossenbach, 1998-1999; Salazar, 2014) and the new one in 2012 (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador, 2012). This implies that teachers technically assessed student learning grounded on the same assessment regulation for almost three decades. The law of education of 1983 established that the “assessment of all levels and stages would be permanent and integral” (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador, 1983, p. 6). This statement of the law was vague and superficial. It was a broad perspective of how assessment should be in Ecuador. Furthermore, unlike the new law, it did not differentiate between diagnostic, summative, and formative assessments. Even though that law indicated that assessment should be continuous, according to the authors’ experience, its application in Ecuadorian classrooms did not reflect that. This law was in force for about 30 years. During that period, not all but different governments tried to make improvements in the educational system of Ecuador (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, n.d.; Ossenbach, 1998-1999; Salazar, 2014). Sadly, those efforts failed to reach their goal because of the way the educational system was structured.

Taking the previous issues, among others, into account the current former Ecuadorian government decided to change the Law of Education. The intention to include more types of assessments is reflected in the bylaws of the Ecuadorian Law of Education (Reglamento a la Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural - LOEI). The regulations of the LOEI state that there are three types of students’ evaluation 1. Diagnostic, 2. Formative and 3. Summative. In regards to formative assessment, the LOEI establishes that “It will take place during the learning process in order to allow the teacher to make adjustments to the teaching methodology, and keep education stakeholders informed on the progress of achieved partial results in the integral development of the student” (Ministerio de Educación, 2012, p. 195; Presidencia de la Repú-

blica del Ecuador, 2012). On the contrary, summative assessment “is made to assign a totalizing evaluation that reflects the proportion of learning outcomes achieved in a degree, course, quimestre or work unit” (Ministerio de Educación, 2012, p. 195; Presidencia de la República del Ecuador, 2012). These two regulations made an important discrimination in assessment. They imply that students need to be assessed not only at the beginning and the end of a course but during the whole process of teaching and learning. Accordingly, it exposes that formative assessment is necessary in order for teachers to make the necessary accommodations for their instruction.

English as a Foreign Language in Ecuador: Project Advance

The government of Ecuador became interested in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language in public schools during the early 1990s. From then until the 2000s the curriculum of English was designed under a program called the Cradle Project. This project was run under an agreement between the Ecuadorian and British Government. “The government of Ecuador wished to make the teaching and learning of English in its schools more effective, and asked the British Council to help them implement a major new project: Curriculum Reform and Development for the Learning of English (CRADLE)” (The CRADLE Project, Ecuador, n.d.; Chuisaca & Paucar, 2010; Haboud, 2009). The stakeholders involved in this project designed a textbook called *Our World Through English (OWTE)*. The textbook consisted of an entire 6-volume collection, one volume per each grade of the high school system. During that period, the Cradle Project published many editions of the textbook. Unfortunately, teaching English was not as effective as expected. The outcomes in terms of students’ English language proficiency were not positive. Students from public high schools graduated with almost no fluency in the English language. Apparently, the curriculum needed adjustments.

For that reason, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education released the English Teaching Strengthening Project - Advance in 2012 to circumvent the issues related to the Cradle Project. Project Advance updates the National English Curriculum of this subject, aligns textbooks to the curriculum, provides professional development for in-service English teachers and makes improvements to the English teaching profession (Fortalecimiento de Inglés, n.d.). These updates resulted in a thorough re-examination of the English education program, including:

- National English Curriculum Guidelines
- Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards: The English Language Teaching Standards
- Classroom Assessment Suggestions for EFL Classes

National English Curriculum Guidelines

In the National English Curriculum Guidelines, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education stated its intention to insert the communicative approach by acknowledging that

[T]he main objective of the present English curriculum design is to help students develop their communicative language skills through the consideration of the following principles:

Language is a system for the expression and conveyance of meaning.

The primary function of language is interaction and communication.

The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses. (Villalba & Rosero, 2012, p. 5)

Moreover, within the same document, it is stated that “the ... English curriculum guidelines are shaped by the CEFR [(Common European Framework of Reference)] and their underlying philosophy is the Communicative Language Teaching approach whose syllabus is organized regarding the different

language functions the learners need to express or understand to communicate effectively.” (Villalba & Rosero, 2012, p. 5). This change has been a huge improvement in the curriculum because it conveyed that English should be taught as a means of communication. As specified in the National English Curriculum Guidelines, the communicative approach is mainly characterized by focusing on “real-world contexts: Because students will ultimately have to use the language productively (through speaking and writing) and receptively (through listening and reading) outside the classroom, classroom tasks/activities must equip students with the necessary skills for communication in everyday contexts.” (Villalba & Rosero, 2012, p. 5). Thus, EFL teachers have to modify their instruction to achieve the aims of this approach.

Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards: The English Language Teaching Standards

Project Advance aligned the Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards to the standards of the Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages most commonly known as TESOL. These standards have been divided into five domains: language, culture, curriculum development, assessment, and professionalism. Since the nature of our work is concerned with authentic formative assessment, we have strictly directed our attention to the corresponding domain, assessment. The assessment standards indicate that educators should:

- [Be] knowledgeable about and able to use a variety of assessment procedures for students
- [D]emonstrate understanding of key indicators of good assessment instruments
- [A]ssess students’ language skills and communicative competence using multiple sources of information
- [U]se performance-based assessment tools and tasks (eg. portfolios, projects, classroom observations, checklists, reading logs, video, spreadsheet software) that measure students’ progress

- [U]se a variety of rubrics to assess students' language developments in classroom settings. (Equipo técnico de Proyecto de Ingles, 2012, p. 6)

Likewise, the English Language Learning Standards (ELLS) specify the attainments students are anticipated to reach after the completion of a proficiency level. The ELLS are grounded in the CEFRL: Learning, teaching, assessment.

The CEFR basically proposes a scale of six language proficiency levels that go from A1, for those who are at a beginning stage, to C2, for those who can use language at high levels of discourse. This simplifies the challenge of understanding and interpreting levels of progress during the learning process and different language qualifications and requirements for learners, teachers, and teacher trainers. As a result, the CEFR aids employers and educational institutions to compare these qualifications easily and how they relate to both locally-tailored as well as international exams. Finally, and in order to provide a common ground for language learning, the CEFR provides assessment indicators for each language skill (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (Villalba & Rosero, 2012, p. 6).

The ELLS have been based on the CEFR because it provides a common reference that describes objectives, content, and methods for English learning. For the Ecuadorian National English Curriculum, they have been divided into three different levels (A1, A2, and B1); all of them contain indicators that target the four linguistic skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Equipo técnico de Proyecto de Ingles, 2012). Finally, since the ELLS are based on the CEFR, the student outcomes described are entirely communicative.

Classroom Assessment Suggestions for EFL Classes

This new communicative-based curriculum requires teachers to modify student assessment to incorporate its new standards. Therefore, the Project Advanced published the Classroom Assessment Suggestions document. Said suggestions are intended to provide teachers with guidelines

on how to assess students in a more effective and appropriate way. In addition, it explicitly states that, in regards to students' assessment, English teachers must follow the legal stipulations established in the LOEI. General recommendations stated in the assessment suggestions document are to "be aware of students' strengths and weaknesses" through diagnostic tests, "evaluate how good students have learnt specific material during a course", "keep track of students' progress" through formative assessment, and "evaluate students' overall level" through summative assessment. All this implies that teachers must "plan and design formal assessment tools (e.g. written and oral tests) as well as informal" (Villalba, 2012, p. 3).

Even though the suggestions above are quite general, the Classroom Assessment Suggestions document also includes more specific ones. These suggestions relate to testing development. In terms of the speaking skill, teachers "should concentrate on item types that test for real-life situations. For example, instead of tests of reading aloud or telling stories, questions should test students' ability to understand and respond appropriately to such things as polite requests, directions, instructions, advice, etc." (Villalba, 2012, p. 4). Regarding the writing skill, the suggestions state that "traditional compositions used in the past are not as appropriately useful as questions requiring students to write letters, reports, messages, etc" (Villalba, 2012, p. 4). Regarding listening and reading assessments, teachers "should assess students' ability to extract specific information of a practical nature rather than tend to have students give back irrelevant bits of information" (Villalba, 2012, p. 4). It also includes the use of rubrics and scoring sheets for teachers to avoid subjectivity when grading. Last but not least, the suggestions even propose the use of checklists to promote students' self-assessment.

Teacher Training for Assessment

The Subsecretary of Educational Professional Development of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (Subsecretaría de Desarrollo Profesional Educativo del Ministerio de Educa-

ción del Ecuador) provides professional training for educators through the Integral System of Educative Teacher Training (Sistema Integral del Desarrollo Profesional Educativo- SiProfe) program. This initiative was implemented in 2008 with the purpose of improving and strengthening the education in Ecuador. Therefore, it offers continuous training for Ecuadorian teachers in areas that, according to the results of SER (Sistema de Evaluación y Rendición de la Educación) evaluations released in 2008, have been identified as a weakness in Ecuadorian educators (Cursos de Formación Continua, n.d.; Formación Docente: Descripción del Módulo, n.d.). Among the many courses that the SiProfe offers for teachers, the one discussed in this chapter is: assessment. Fortunately, according to the public statistics of the courses or courses report provided in the Information System (Sistema de Información-Sime) webpage of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, the SiProfe launched a course named Assessment of Learning (Evaluación para el Aprendizaje) in 2012.

This course was implemented in that year and was available on the courses offered by the SiProfe until the next year (Formación Docente: Estadísticas públicas de los cursos/ Reportes de cursos, n.d.). The Assessment of Learning course was addressed to all educators that worked in Ecuadorian public institutions regardless of their teaching area. According to Scoggin (2011), one of the objectives of assessment of learning was that educators be able to incorporate in their professional practice different evaluation strategies such as evaluation rubrics and self-assessment, learning logs, peer-assessment, group work combined with individual work and their possible uses in the learning process. Also, assessment for learning courses also seek that educators comprehend that assessment serves to help students learn; it has to be continuous and promote metacognition (understanding of one's thinking process). Therefore, this course covered topics that deal with assessment criteria, coherence between authentic performance and learning objectives, authentic assessment, types of evaluations, elaboration of an authentic performance, and formative assessment.

There is one main consideration to highlight from the courses implemented by the SiProfe program. It is that none of the courses have been created for the assessment of foreign language learning. Nonetheless, this does not mean that EFL teachers are excluded from taking the SiProfe courses. The point is that the content of the courses is not contextualized to EFL teaching; therefore, it does not really meet EFL teachers' teaching needs. As a matter of fact, in regards to English, there have been some courses for EFL teachers through the SiProfe; however, such courses have been only created to help EFL teachers enhance their English proficiency level. Currently, there is no course offered to support EFL assessment. The one specified in the previous paragraph is directed at all educators regardless of the teaching area. The methods, strategies, and techniques used for assessment of foreign language skills development are different from the assessment methods used to evaluate students' learning progress within other subject areas. This is because Ecuador has an EFL setting. Therefore, English is taught as a foreign language; this means that English classes focus on helping students develop their linguistic skills instead of content area topic knowledge, which would be the case in English as a Foreign Language (ESL) contexts.

As mentioned before, when assessing students, EFL teachers search to evaluate and measure students' linguistic skills enhancement and the internalization of vocabulary for communication purposes. These skills include how to communicate in different settings to make requests, ask/answer questions, ask/give advice, etc.; how to write formal or informal letters in English, write summaries, etc.; how to read for main ideas and details, etc. On the other hand, the objective of other content area teachers is usually to evaluate students' content knowledge and the development of skills strictly related to their subject such as understanding of how photosynthesis works in the case of science; regions characteristics and how countries are divided in the case of social studies; how to solve factorization problems in the case of math; how to read music symbols or how to play an instrument in the case of music, etc.

Recommendations with Justifications

The scenario exposed above describes the current transition that is taking place in the educational context of Ecuador. It reflects evidence of the intentions of the former Ecuadorian government to improve education in Ecuador. As a result of those efforts, the current regulations of the law emphasize the implementation of summative and formative assessment. In addition, the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in public high schools has also been impacted. As stated before, changes in this area comprise of the implementation of a curriculum aligned with the communicative approach, elaboration of standards for students and teachers which are aligned with international standards, guidelines for the curriculum implementation, and assessment suggestions for English teachers. In regards to the latter, the assessment suggestions act as a guide for English teachers to move towards authentic assessment.

From our professional perspective, this intention is certainly positive. Regrettably, we believe there is still a gap in student assessment that has not been filled in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms. The gap relies on the fact that even though authentic assessment is suggested in the current curriculum, its implementation is not reflected in the classroom. For that reason, it is pivotal to make a call to action. This action has to be conducted by EFL teachers because they are the ones who ultimately execute assessment practices in their classrooms. Therefore, we are looking forward to making some suggestions to EFL teachers about assessment practices based on what experts say and research demonstrates. These suggestions include:

- Implementation of performance-based assessments as a means to evaluate EFL students' learning progress and language skills development authentically.
- Use of rubrics and checklists to grade performance-based assessments.

Implementation of performance-based assessments

We suggest the following forms of assessment because unlike traditional paper-and-pencil tests or standardized tests, through performance-based assessments, authentic assessments provide educators with the opportunity to gain insights into the students' progress continuously. Furthermore, authentic assessments enable educators to assess students through the performance of tasks that are connected to the students' life.

In accordance with this theme, Wiggins (1993) explained the importance of authenticity within students' assessment. In his point of view, authenticity is important within students' assessments because "...the aim of education is to help the individual become a competent intellectual performer, not a passive "selector" of orthodox and prefabricated answers" (p. 209). Therefore, teachers should promote real and authentic construction of understanding through the assessments they administer to their students.

Similarly, O'Malley & Pierce (1996) provided a theoretical rationale for the use of authentic assessments grounded in constructivism. According to these authors, "if students construct information as they learn, and apply the information in classroom settings, assessment should provide the students with opportunities to construct responses and to apply their learning to problems that mirror their classroom activities in authentic ways" (p. 10). O'Malley & Pierce (1996) also stated that authentic assessments are concerned with a variety of ways to assess students. Accordingly, these assessments should represent instructional and curriculum components such as goals, class objectives, and instructional planning.

In agreement with Wiggins (1993) and O'Malley & Pierce (1996), Lacy (2002) stated that alternative or authentic assessments influence learning significantly. These types of assessment concentrate on relevant and real-life transferable instructional elements. Through authentic assessment, students are provided with useful feedback. This feedback will help learners to clarify their misapprehensions of evaluation tasks. Similarly, authentic assessment is used to conduct future instruction (Lacy, 2002).

Lacy (2002) also suggested that authentic assessments resemble real-life learning tasks and assess abilities that are pivotal to daily life. Furthermore, this author explained that authentic assessments are feasible to [S]tretch the learner's ability to understand concepts and to apply them in practical situations, [they] appeal to diverse learning styles, and measure more complex mental processes in meaningful contexts ... [They] may reflect meaningful aspects of the world outside of school, aspects of a particular discipline, or aspects of ideas and meanings valued in themselves as part of the school culture (p. 92).

Herrera, Morales & Murry (2013) claimed that for second language learners to achieve abilities such as "use [...] language skills, cognitive development, and academic knowledge to listen, read, comprehend, synthesize, analyze, compare, contrast, relate, articulate, write, evaluate, and more" (p. 22) it is not a short-term process. Therefore, the attainment of these capacities cannot be gauged by simply using standardized or traditional tests at the end of a study term. Furthermore, when assessing students' progress, teachers should consider several variables such as setting conditions, the time the assessment is being administered, and how confident the learners feel towards utilizing the target language. Contemplating this, they provide a rationale for the use of authentic assessments. This rationale brings out the fact that traditional or standardized tests do not always show information that would enable classroom teachers to make accommodations for their students within their instruction. Authentic assessments, on the other hand, can help teachers do this. As stated by Herrera et al. (2013), among other things, authentic assessments make student assessment smoother. They focus their attention on real-life situations, assignments or aspects that are important for the learners and their circle.

As it has been implicitly stated, authentic assessments are related to the performance of tasks that are connected to real-life situations. As a matter of fact, Wiggins (1993) & Herrera et al. (2013) argued that students' learning construction must be elaborated by actually performing a task.

According to these authors, performance is the execution of tasks or procedures that promote higher order thinking skills through creative activities. Therefore, when performing a task, “the student must draw upon elements from many sources and put these together into a structure or pattern not clearly there before” (Wiggins, 1993, p. 215). Consequently, performance should be assessed through different representations conducted in varied contexts and events or circumstances (Wiggins, 1993). This allows educators to watch and track student work in different periods of times (Herrera et al., 2013). In addition to this, in another work, Wiggins (1997) stated that this type of assessment evaluates student performance authentically because it exposes students to situations in which they demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have developed through their learning process. Furthermore, students will also be able to experiment and test new things through the performance of these assessments.

For McMillan (1997) performance-based assessment is the type of assessment that enables educators to observe and judge student skills and abilities to produce a final work. Therefore, the purpose of this type of assessments is to have students elaborate their product by using their knowledge and skills to their fullest potential. Accordingly, a performance-based assessment must promote students’ performance, creation, construction, or production of something, be developed through ongoing work which may last from days to weeks, allow for observability, be founded on real-life settings and issues, as well as demand the integration of reasoning skills. Elaborating on the strengths of performance-based assessments, McMillan (1997) discusses their link to instruction. According to this author, the results of performance of students reflects instruction work. Furthermore, the execution of the assessment enables students to illustrate their student knowledge while at the same time promotes student learning (McMillan, 1997).

Based on what the aforementioned assessment experts claim about authentic assessment, we believe that educators in Ecuador should incorporate performance-based

assessment practices in their classrooms to evaluate their students in a more authentic way. However, before providing some specific examples of performance-based assessments for the classroom, it is important to highlight that educators must be able to identify how performance-based tasks serve to assess students authentically. We believe that educators should know this because of what it is stated by Allen, Frey, and Schmitt (2012). For these authors, “tasks are not authentic, necessarily, just because they are similar to real-world tasks, but they must mirror the complexity, collaboration, and high-level thinking that is necessary for the most intellectual of professional problem-solving and decision-making” (p. 10). Likewise, McMillan (1997) states that these types of assessments are not always authentic. Their authenticity degree varies according to the task. Finally, many (but not all) performance-based assessments are also classified as authentic assessments (Oosterhof, 2003 in Allen, Frey, and Schmitt, 2012; Mertler, 2003 in Allen, Frey, and Schmitt, 2012).

Therefore, in order to provide educators with a guide for tasks that can be implemented as performance-based assessments, we suggest the following examples of performance-based tasks. These examples are grounded in recommendations made by authors such as Lacy (2002), Herrera et al. (2013), Nitko and Brookart (2007), Carter, Hernandez & Richison (2009), Chesbro (2006), Waldman & Crippen (2009), Young (2003), O’Malley & Pierce (1996), and McMillan (1997).

Lacy (2002) provides examples of authentic performance assessments that include case studies, checklists/documentation, constructed-responses, cooperative-groupwork, demonstrations, displays, draw-and-tell tests, exhibitions, journals, logs, portfolios, problem-solving, projects, reading-writing responses, oral interviews, and writing samples. Likewise, Herrera et al. (2013) asserted that performance-based assessments include hands-on activities and prove to be a helpful tool for teachers to assess students’ previous knowledge as well as formative. On the same line, Nitko and Brookart (2007) list several types of performance assessments such as projects, portfolios, demonstrations, oral pre-

sentations, and dramatizations. As a more practical way to help educators, these authors even illustrate an example of a Multiple Intelligence Assessment Menu. In that menu, they provide a list of assessments of each type of intelligence.

Interactive Notebooks (IN) are another example of performance-based assessment. They have been recently implemented with great results. The notebooks are textbooks that students create throughout a year, semester or unit. IN creation stimulates the use of both right and left hemisphere of the brain as it has been based on brain research. Overall, through IN students can organize their learning by allowing them to take control of what is of most importance. For teachers, it is a hands-on way to organize and assess students learning because it is an ongoing authentic assessment that enables them to modify instruction according to student production (Carter, Hernandez & Richison, 2009; Chesbro, 2006; Waldman & Crippen, 2009; Young, 2003).

O'Malley & Pierce (1996) proposed several examples of performance-based tasks that can be implemented to assess English Language Learners' progress. These examples comprise of oral interviews, story or text retelling, writing samples, projects/exhibitions, and experiments/demonstrations. Within projects/exhibitions, O'Malley & Pierce (1996) provide sub-examples which include role plays, artistic creations, and charts, graphs for these types of performance assessments. They also mention portfolios as authentic assessments and classify tasks according to the language skills they target. For instance, for speaking they propose oral interviews, pictures-cued descriptions or stories, radio broadcasts, video clips, information gaps, story/text retelling, improvisations/role-plays/simulations, oral reports, and debates. For reading, educators can have students perform activities such as retellings, checklists, anecdotal records, cloze tests, and reading logs. Finally, for writing skills assessment, O'Malley & Pierce (1996) recommend the use of writing samples such as written summaries, dialogue journals, learning logs; and, the use of portfolios as an authentic assessment of performance-based pieces of writing.

Similar to O'Malley & Pierce (1996), McMillan (1997) includes learning targets for communicative performance-based assessments. He describes how the performance of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills could be framed and assessed within different levels of difficulty. For reading, he proposes that educators can divide the tasks into three phases: before, during, and after reading. While working on these tasks, students can perform the following tasks: "stating main ideas; identify the setting, characters, and events in stories; drawing inferences from context, and reading speed" (p. 203). Regarding writing, he proposes the use of portfolios and the completion of essays or papers such as persuasive letters, persuasive advertisements or speeches, research papers, and editorials. For listening and speaking, he suggests the implementation of oral speeches, singing songs, and debate competitions.

Taking into account Nitko and Brookart's (2007) idea about the elaboration of assessment menus, we have taken the examples proposed by the different authors stated above to elaborate a performance-based assessment menu for educators. According to what the aforementioned authors say, our professional criteria, and our experience as EFL teachers, each example of performance-based assessment have been linked to the communicative skills they may evaluate. Suggested readings for each performance-based task have also been included. We expect that this assessment menu will serve as a guide for EFL educators to assess their students' skills in more authentic ways.

Table 1: PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT MENU

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT MENU		
Performance-Based Tasks	Language Skills	Suggested Readings
Cooperative group work	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	Kagan, Kagan, & Kagan, 1995; Kagan, Kagan, & Kagan, 1997; Kagan & Kagan, 1992-2000; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Lacy, 2002; Luongo-Orlando, 2003

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT MENU

Debates	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking, and Writing	McMillan (1997) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Dialogue journals	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Lacy, 2002 Luongo-Orlando, (2003) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Dramatizations	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Nitko and Brookart (2007)
Hands-On Activities	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Herrera et al., 2013; Lacy, 2002
Interactive Notebooks	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Carter, et al., 2009; Chesbro, 2006; Waldman & Crippen, 2009; Young, 2003
Journals/Logs	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Lacy, 2002 Luongo-Orlando, (2003)
Oral presentations/ interviews/reports	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Lacy, 2002 Nitko and Brookart (2007) McMillan (1997) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Picture-cued descriptions	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Luongo-Orlando, (2003) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Portfolios	Reading and Writing		Bush & Lambrecht, 2008 Lacy, 2002; McMillan (1997); Nitko and Brookart (2007) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Projects	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Bush & Lambrecht, 2008 Lacy, 2002; Nitko and Brookart (2007); O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Radio broadcasts	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Reading-Writing Responses	Reading and Writing		Lacy, 2002; Luongo-Orlando, (2003)
Role-Plays	Listening, Reading, and Writing	Speaking,	Luongo-Orlando, (2003) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT MENU

Singing Songs	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	McMillan (1997)
Story or text retelling	Listening, Speaking, and Writing	Luongo-Orlando, (2003) O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Video clips	Listening and Speaking	O'Malley & Pierce (1996)
Writing samples/written summaries	Reading and Writing	O'Malley & Pierce (1996)

Source: Self-elaboration

It is important to stress that the majority of the activities proposed in this assessment menu can be applied for evaluating one, two, or four of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The skills evaluated will depend on different factors such as how the educator applies the activities, what skill he/she intends to assess, the English proficiency level of the students, students' age, and grade. Therefore, this menu is not restrictive. Instead, it suggests what language skills are more likely to be assessed. The ultimate decision will be made depending on the students' needs and assessment purposes.

Use of Rubrics and Checklists to Grade Performance-based Assessments

We suggest the use of rubrics and checklists not only because they are explicitly stated in the Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards and the EFL students Assessment Suggestions documents, but also because they avoid subjectivity when grading a performance-based task. Therefore, scoring rubrics and checklists are pivotal components of performance-based assessments. Furthermore, we believe that they help both teachers and students visualize what it is expected of students when performing a task. In addition, they assist teachers in applying a more accurate and less biased grade for those tasks.

Rubrics

Rubrics are a set of rules applied to evaluate “the quality of a student’s performance” (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007, p. 244). They serve as guidance for judging performance and help educators to keep consistency in judgment. Furthermore, they contain rating scales that specify the quality levels of performance of the tasks (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007). Hamer (2010) in Villalba (2012) stated that “one way to make scoring scales more objective is to “write careful descriptions of what the different scores for each category actually represents” (p. 10). According to Herrera, Morales, & Murry (2013), rubrics help language learners become accountable for their learning progress because they can be used as a learners’ self-assessment instrument. In addition, O’Malley & Pierce (1996) claimed that rubrics are helpful instruments not only for teachers and students but parents as well. Accordingly, these instruments help these three educational agents to answer questions about how language learners are doing and how these learners can improve their skills to do better on a task.

Rubrics go hand in hand with this type of assessment. In fact, in order to be called performance-based assessment, a performance activity must be accompanied by a scoring rubric to evaluate the attainments of that activity; otherwise, that activity can only be called a performance activity, not a performance-based assessment (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007). For that reason, it is important to establish the purpose of the assessment task and what performance students are expected to do in that task (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996). Nitko & Brookhart (2007) refer to this point as establishing criteria for the evaluation of learning target outcomes, which is an important characteristic of performance-based assessments. If performance tasks do not have evaluation criteria, they are simply class activities (O’Malley & Pierce, 1996).

When creating a rubric, educators should consider that the first thing they must do is to define what they want their students to be able to do (Herrera, Morales & Murry, 2007). In other words, what outcome they want to get from a task align-

ned to the lesson goals and curriculum expectations (Luongo-Orlando, 2003). Educators should also consider writing a description for detailing “the requirements that must be met to attain each quantified level of performance” (Herrera, Morales & Murry 2007, p. 47). These requirements relate to the scoring criteria and rating scales as suggested by Nitko & Brookhart (2007) and O’Malley & Pierce (1996), Luongo-Orlando (2003).

Checklists

Checklists are tools that can be used to grade performance-based assessments. A checklist is a tool used to register the existence or absence of particular representations, tasks, or performance as they are listed in it (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007). Like Rubrics, they can be used by the teacher, the students, or peers. They assist the teachers and students in identifying the “skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to perform the tasks associated with the activity” (Herrera, Morales & Murry 2007, p. 47). Checklists are easy to design and flexible. As a guide for students’ self-evaluation, they illustrate steps they should take and requirements to meet in a task. They help learners become more aware of their learning because they “[C]apture and catalog information about student performance and to inform instruction and provide evidence on which to base evaluation” (Rowlands, 2007. p, 61). Checklists play a key role in terms of organization. They illustrate the requirements of a project as a set of items assigned by the instructor (Bush & Lambrecht, 2008). This feature of checklists contributes to minimizing the chances of misunderstandings between teachers, students, and parents and provide a more accurate picture of what is expected in students’ performance.

Conclusions

Assessment, which is a means of collecting data about students' learning progress, can help educators make informed decisions not only about their students' improvement but also to reflect upon their teaching practice and the curriculum of a given subject area (Nitko and Brookhart, 2007). Furthermore, as indicated by Pratt (1994), assessment is referred to as a domain that can provoke stress in both students and teachers. Therefore, it is an area that needs special attention. Assessment results depend on the success of both students' and teachers' work. For that reason, it is important that educators reflect upon how they can inform themselves about their students' learning progress, their strengths, and weaknesses of their teaching practice, and how the curriculum is working for their classes. They will achieve this by having their students work on more authentic and meaningful activities than completing quizzes, questionnaires, or taking traditional paper-and-pencil tests. In regards to this point, authentic assessment is the assessment of students' learning by providing students the opportunity to actually apply what they have learned in the classroom within activities that resemble real-life like situations (Herrera, Morales & Murry, 2013; Lacy, 2002; McMillan, 1997; Nitko & Brookhart, 2007; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Wiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1993). These types of activities should become the target of EFL educators in order to incentivize their students to demonstrate their learnings by actually doing something in a significant way. As a result, educators can become better informed about the results of the teaching/learning process conducted under their teaching performance. Assessment is a topic that surpasses frontiers, and its reality varies depending on the context.

In Ecuador's EFL setting, most assessment has been traditionally linked to the Grammatical Approach which is originated in the behaviorist perspective. This approach relies on the use repetition, drills, and memorization for second language learning. Hence, Ecuadorian EFL student assess-

ment has been mostly conducted through the application of paper-and-pencil tests, quizzes, and homework. According to the authors' experience, as participant observers, EFL students have limited exposure to authentic assessments. Their learning progress has been mostly based on their understanding of grammar rather than in the performance of their communicative skills. This kind of assessment has been taking place for about two decades. However, in 2012, the Ministry of Education launched Project Advance.

This project inserted an entire communicative curriculum aligned with the CEFR. It also included new standards for EFL teachers and students. What is most important about the standards in terms of assessment is that they include the "use of performance-based assessment tools and tasks (eg. portfolios, projects, classroom observations, checklists, reading logs, video, spreadsheet software) that measure students' progress" as well as the use of "a variety of rubrics to assess students' language development in classroom settings" (Equipo técnico de Proyecto de Inglés, 2012, p. 6). Additionally, Project Advance included the Assessment Suggestions document which provides general and specific recommendations for EFL teachers. Many of those recommendations are concerned with test construction, especially about productive language skills, such as speaking and writing. One of those suggestions stated that educators "should concentrate on item types that tests for real-life situations" (Villalba, 2012, p. 4). This implies that educators should encourage students to demonstrate their learning through assessments that are more genuine for them.

Aware of the existing gaps in regards to authentic assessment practices in Ecuadorian EFL classes as well as the alignments set by Project Advance, we have proposed the following research-based suggestions for educators. The first suggestion is that EFL teachers implement performance-based assessment practices as an authentic way to assess their students. Performance-based assessments can include (as it was illustrated in the assessment menu. See Fig. 1) hands-on activities, projects, role-plays, and any other tasks that repli-

cate real-life situations. Portfolios or interactive notebooks can also be used to assess students authentically. Lastly, we recommend EFL educators to use checklists and rubrics in order to provide a more accurate and objective grading of students' work.

Authors such as Herrera et al. (2013), Luongo-Orlando (2003), and O'Malley & Pierce (1996) underscore the positive results and effectiveness of authentic assessments in second language learning. Considering this, the implementation of these strategies and techniques will provide EFL teachers a plethora of opportunities to authentically assess and fairly grade the work of EFL students in Ecuador. Furthermore, they serve as an alternative to formative assessment and to change the evaluation scenario portrayed within Ecuadorian EFL classes today.

The new English curriculum in Ecuador is based on a communicative perspective for learning a foreign language. Therefore, students need to be assessed using English for communication purposes. In that context, performance-based assessments can be highly used to promote communication. For example, through the performance of role-plays, dramatizations, or interviews, students can be asked to interact and show evidence of the development of their speaking skills and listening skills. At the same time, they are prompted to develop their social skills by using English as another means to communicate with others. Depending on the purpose of the assessment (what linguistic skill the educators intends to assess), age and English proficiency level of the students, the use of role-plays, dramatizations, or interviews can also be used to promote the development of other language skills such as writing (if students are to create their own scripts for the role-plays, dramatizations, or interviews), and reading (if students are to read and understand role-play, dramatizations, or interviews scripts created by others).

Another example is the use of interactive notebooks. These notebooks can be implemented to show evidence of student writing and reading skill enhancement. Therefore, they can serve to assess students' skill improvement authenti-

cally. Interactive notebooks can be designed in such a way that students can include their graphic organizers, charts, hands-on materials, or any other authentic piece of the work developed throughout their classes. Educators can see the improvement of students' writing and reading skills as they track and assess those skills through the students' pieces of work collected in their interactive notebooks.

In order to make a bigger impact on student assessment, EFL teachers should complement the use of performance-based assessment with rubrics and checklists. These grading instruments can benefit both EFL educators and students; for educators, they are beneficial because by using rubrics and checklists they will provide accurate and objective grades. For students, they are a guide to know what is expected of them within a task so that they can complete all the parameters established in the rubric or checklist to obtain a high grade. Performance-based assessments combined with rubrics and/or checklists are proven to be beneficial for Ecuadorian EFL teachers to assess communicative skills effectively and authentically. As part of the authors' experience, communication skills are developed through practice and performance-based activities and allow EFL educators to evaluate the improvement of those skills authentically.

Our suggestions are intended to recommend educators the implementation performance-based assessment as a more authentic way to assess their students' progress. Consequently, this will help them to obtain a better perspective of the development of their students' linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in a more realistic way. However, it is in the teachers' hands to implement these suggestions and change the picture of the assessment of student learning in their classrooms settings.

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02 Chapter Role-plays as an assessment tool in English as a foreign language (EFL) class

María Rojas Encalada

Abstract

Roleplaying is a technique that allows teachers to assess students' speaking skills development. This is accomplished when the causes that prevent learners from taking part in Role-Plays (RP) are reduced through actions that will lead them to learn more vocabulary, have more grammar control, and become more fluent, less shy, more encouraged, and more capable of pronouncing words correctly. The author of the present chapter connects the participants' perceptions about the use of RP to develop speaking skills from a study conducted by Rojas (2017) with a study conducted by Nation and Newton (2009) regarding the causes that affect learners' willingness to speak in the target language. The author also does some research to apply some procedures to overcome this issue. For this purpose, students need to be observed regularly through the use of rubrics to identify possible causes that prevent them from developing their conversational abilities.

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Keywords: Role-play, assessment, Grammar control, fluency, shyness, encouragement, pronunciation, perceptions

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how to make RP a better tool to assess speaking skills development in EFL classes. To that end, the author made a connection between learners' perceptions about the use of RP from a study conducted by Rojas (2017) with the causes that prevent students from speaking mentioned in a study conducted by Nation and Newton (2009). These causes include "inadequate vocabulary, inadequate control of grammar, lack of fluency, shyness, and lack of encouragement" (p. 112).

Moreover, some research on mispronunciation was performed which is also another reason, according to participants' opinions in Rojas' study, for not liking to take part in RP. There are also some considerations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of RP and the procedures to innovate this technique such as the use of video role-plays.

According to the learners' perceptions, there are aspects to be improved in EFL classes for a more appropriate assessment of conversational abilities. It is recommended to identify the aspects that affect students to participate in conversational activities and to take a course of actions that will enable them to be more willing to get involved in RP.

To make RP a stronger assessment tool, this section of the book presents a series of procedures, mentioned in previous studies, to overcome the causes that interfere with the learners' willingness to speak. Consequently, learners will feel more prepared, confident, and motivated when participating in this communicative activity. To that end, students need to be examined continuously through the use of rubrics to detect possible issues that prevent them from developing their conversational abilities. This analysis will also allow instructors to take the necessary actions to make RP a better assessment tool.

Literature Review

First of all, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of how RP is defined by different authors, their procedures, benefits, and limitation. In this regard, according to Alabsi (2016), RP is a recognized strategy that leads learners to become acquainted with unknown communities. Role-playing allows students to practice conversations using the target language in different situations. Another study conducted by Yen, Hou, and Chang (2015) considers that RP is a significant technique since it centers on developing speaking skills in communicative classes through taking part in roles of specific situations.

Additionally, Altun (2015) maintains that it is beneficial to apply RP in EFL classes since they lead learners to develop communicative skills and improve their conversational abilities. Furthermore, this technique enables students to link vocabulary, practical knowledge and topics being learned in class (Alabsi, 2016).

In this respect, when students are learning to express themselves in situations related to a professional industry, they are presented with vocabulary, expressions, and phrases link to this sector. According to Alabsi (2016), when students RP the terms learned in class, they improve their understanding of the vocabulary and the way they are used in a meaningful context.

Correspondingly, drama-based RP facilitates learners to devise and develop their roles autonomously (Sirisrimangorn and Suwanthep, 2013). Students are required to be involved in the preparation of RP and perform it in a real context. In other words, if the RP is about a marriage proposal, the participants will not only prepare the dialogues but also arrange the situation such as having them organize the place where the marriage proposal will take place as if it were a park or a house.

Practice speaking skills through RP are also beneficial for beginners if the activity is according to their level. It is essential that students get involved in conversational events from the beginning of their target language learning process, so they will be enabled to develop the necessary abilities throughout all the stages of their language development. In this regard, a study conducted by Limberg (2015) maintains that weak learners can prepare easy to perform RPs such as an apology. First, they do it in their native language and then in their target language by having the aid of a model. In this way, learners slowly improve their understanding of culturally correct behaviors towards the harms of social norms and, at the same time, practice the use of words and expressions for apologies in the foreign language while roleplaying.

It is recommended to have students interact naturally in factual circumstances with the intention of having them get used to conversations they might experience in the future. In this context, Sinwongsuwat (2012) conducted a study in which it is analyzed the benefits of non-scripted RPs as an activity that focuses on natural conversation. The study discusses that if the technique is applied with an appropriate rubric, this task will allow us to assess better the students' ability to speak in real communicative situations and with practice develop better English conversation proficiency. Additionally, evaluating learners' oral language development through rubrics is necessary to identify any repeated errors they might make to take the measures required to correct these mistakes.

A different study related to the assessment of speaking skills development was conducted by Michaud and Hooper (2016) at a Japanese private university where a project about EFL drama in language acquisition script writing took place. This project focuses on finding out if role-playing the scripts improved awareness of the setting, speakers' roles and purpose, and an increase of language ability. The results of this research pointed out that script writing activities are necessary to guide students to develop an understanding of a real-life situation. Concerning this, these authors main-

tain the usefulness of scripted RPs since they include elements that appear in the contextual drama. Additionally, they allow learners to use their own words and actions when they co-create their dialogues.

Even though RPs are beneficial to develop speaking skills, they also show some disadvantages. In this regard, the study conducted by Rojas (2017) indicates that according to the participants in the research, besides the positive aspects of RP, they also show some adverse outcomes related to mispronunciation, lack of peer's support, the absence of vocabulary and language understanding, uninteresting RP, and feeling shame. These drawbacks perceived by students are connected with the causes mentioned by Nation and Newton (2009) that impair them to participate in communicative activities successfully. Therefore, these participants recommended making RPs resemble real-life situations, help from the teacher, pronunciation training, and vocabulary practice.

Role plays adaptations for improving foreign language practice

Inadequate Vocabulary

Learning the meaning of words in a foreign language entails a long process before students are ready enough to apply words suitably in conversations. The breadth of vocabulary use and knowledge is applying terms appropriately in daily oral communication. Whereas, the depth of vocabulary learning refers to the different techniques or processes that a learner needs to go through to reach a broad vocabulary control. In this regard, the vocabulary use and knowledge in the context of RP task performance are essential to assess the extent of the student's breadth and depth of knowledge and take actions to improve their vocabulary learning.

About this, Nation (2001) mentions that with the intention of training students on vocabulary, it is necessary to consider the "number of words in the language, the number of words

known by native speakers and the number of words necessary to practice the language” (p. 6).

In this respect, Seal (1991) maintains that there are two types of teaching strategies for vocabulary training in an original context. Unplanned teaching strategy refers to the spontaneous help of the teacher when necessary. This control needs to be done during the preparation and at the end of the activity.

The second strategy proposed by Seal refers to three steps in which the teacher expresses the meaning, checks the definition, and consolidates the purpose in the learner’s memory. These steps are performed in class at the introduction of a topic associating them with situations students experience in real life.

On the other hand, planned vocabulary strategy, according to Seal, deals with specific and prepared vocabulary teaching. Through this strategy, instructors reflect on the terms that are necessary for students to learn to accomplish a particular task in class.

It is important not to have students participate in RPs immediately after presenting and practicing the new words. On the contrary, it is recommended to reinforce these terms using different resources such as audiovisuals to have them feel confident when role-playing. The audiovisual approach made the difference in the age of technology for language teaching by presenting the advantages of visuals and producing language from them (Barani, Mazandarani, & Rezaie, 2010). Consequently, audiovisuals expand the learner’s practice of the language since they will be able to observe how native speakers use the new terms in a specific situation.

Inadequate Control of Grammar

Communicative Approach classes promote grammar teaching to facilitate students to produce regular oral communication. In this respect, Hinkel and Fotos (2001) consider that there is a new view of grammar instruction which is a combination of formal training and communicative lan-

guage use. Purely communicative program of study is deemed to be insufficient because of lack of grammar instruction which according to Skehan findings (as cited in Hinkel & Fotos, 2001) tends to produce fossilization and classroom pidgins.

Lack of Fluency

If pronunciation, vocabulary, language understanding, and grammar are developed, students will become more fluent when speaking in the target language. Accordingly, learning a foreign language entails using it naturally and fluently which is essential to develop the ability to communicate (Yang, 2014). However, to be able to talk casually and without difficulties, instructors need to make sure that the class environment has the appropriate conditions for this to happen.

In this respect, fluency, according to Nation and Newton (2009), would develop as long as the activity is meaningful; the learners are active members of the learning process and build fluency from their previous experience, and encouragement for learners to perform beyond their level.

For this purpose, RPs are beneficial to develop speaking fluency as long as they are related to topics students are interested in, or if they are connected to activities learners will do in their future lives. Furthermore, if participants are expected to RP efficiently, they are required to have previous knowledge of a specific topic, vocabulary and grammar structures. Learners, as a consequence, will feel encouraged and more confident when role-playing.

Together with these three conditions to develop speaking skills, instructors should also observe how students communicate orally to be able to provide them feedback about their errors. Considering this, a recent study at a state university in Turkey investigated about EFL teachers' perceptions on corrective feedback (CF) during conversation classes and their strategies for error correction. The results of this study demonstrated that EFL teachers are likely to make corrections on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to deve-

lop students' accuracy during speaking. Furthermore, EFL teachers perceive that the correction of mistakes may contribute to preventing the formation of habit since students will self-correct among themselves, they will use the target language pragmatically and appropriately and improve learners' accuracy and fluency. Through CF, teachers focus on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary mistakes that interfere with meaning while speaking (Değirmenci & Aydin, 2017). By providing students with CF, they will be aware of what is right and wrong and will not make the same mistakes in subsequent conversational tasks.

Fear to Speak in the Target Language

While learners are developing their conversational abilities, it is common for them to make mistakes since they still do not have a good command of the spoken language. Therefore, instructors need to understand the current language level of each student and encourage them to develop the language by transmitting them positive feelings. In this respect, according to Krashen (1981), the affective filter hypothesis identifies how anxiety influences language learning.

Furthermore, students' anxiety is also produced because they do not have full control of the target language. However, the more proficient they are, the less fearful they feel. A study conducted by Lee (2015), examines the relationships between teachers' oral CF and changes in international students' language anxiety levels. The results showed that the majority of the teachers' oral CF had positive influences on the learners' affective variables, mainly decreasing their anxiety about speaking English. Consequently, it is resolved that CF helps students to be more proficient in the target language and at the same time more confident when participating in communicative activities such as RP.

Lack of Encouragement

When students are motivated to develop their conversational abilities, they are more willing to participate in different speaking tasks. In this stage, instructors should include tech-

nological means such as video RPs to have them interact among themselves in a meaningful and enjoyable context. In this respect, Hwang, Huang, Shadiev, Wu, and Chen, (2014) maintain that instructors should use technology to motivate students to develop speaking skills. These authors suggested activities based on mobile learning to improve English speaking skills which will enable learners to be more interested in participating in communicative tasks.

An advantage of filming a RP is that students have the chance to rehearse several times until they produce intelligible dialogues. Furthermore, they can arrange the place or wear specific clothing to pretend they are firefighters, nurses, doctors, etc. Learners can also go to a bank, a hospital, a hotel or any other place that relates to the topic of the activity. A study related to video RPs conducted by Garcia-Sanchez (2016) centers on active learning strategies in EFL classes at a university classroom to encourage communicative, collaborative, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) skills in situational video RPs link to their professional fields. The results of the study demonstrated that students' communications, professional situations, and needs have developed outside the scenario of a class. Consequently, learners can make speaking skills improvements since they have the chance to participate in meaningful conversational activities.

It is necessary that the instructor designs activities that encourage students to develop speaking skills in situations that are meaningful and interested. Otherwise, if the tasks are irrelevant to students, the learning goal will be trying to achieve. With the aim of making RPs more enjoyable, students need to be motivated to interact and hold conversations in situations similar to the ones they will encounter in the future.

Another study that focuses on the importance of motivation to learn English as a Foreign Language was conducted in the Amazon region of Ecuador by Ochoa, Cabrera, Quiñónez, Castillo, and González (2016). This study aimed to determine the relationship between communicative activities and their

influence on learners' motivation. The outcomes from the data collection methods demonstrated that learners and instructors perceived that communicative activities are exciting. Furthermore, participants mentioned feeling encouraged when participating in forthcoming events because they allow to develop fluency, pronunciation, and to use the target language in a real-life context.

Mispronunciation

It is necessary to pronounce the words appropriately, so the listener will be able to comprehend the message efficiently. In this regard, instructors should do all the necessary recasts (the teacher's correction of mispronounced words by showing to students the right usage) when learners mispronounce words for them to become aware of the proper pronunciation. The result of a study conducted by Sato (2016) showed that phonological recast proved to be useful to reduce learners' mistakes. Additionally, Milla and Mayo (2014) maintain that recast is necessary since the aim of the class through role-playing is to enable learners to notice the correct pronunciation of words. A recast as exemplified by these authors would be like the following:

Learner: the awards presentation ceremony
which is celebrated xxx many artists perform xxx
popular televised /*televi:zd/ xxx.

Teacher: televised /'tel.i.vaɪz / [RC] no televised
/*televi:zd/ [EC] televised...(p.13)

Furthermore, listening exercises are highly recommended to become familiar with how native speakers of the target language pronounce words. In this respect, Baker (2014) maintains that pronunciation techniques that relate to the understanding of audio, lead learners to focus on input and output which resemble what is required in everyday real-life situations.

If students learn enough vocabulary, have better control of grammar usage, and pronounce words clearly, their level of fear while roleplaying will decrease. As a result, they

become more enthusiastic about the activity since they feel confident in a friendlier environment where they can function appropriately.

Teachers are crucial elements to help students develop an appropriate pronunciation of words through talking to them in the target language and correcting mistakes whenever learners mispronounce words. Thence, teacher's guidance is required to develop correct pronunciation through recast.

Use of rubrics

Finally, with the aim of ensuring that students are acquiring the necessary vocabulary, control of grammar, fluency, confidence, motivation, and intelligible pronunciation, it is essential to evaluate the development of conversational skills during a course period through rubrics. By doing this, teachers can assess the progress of students' conversational abilities through real-life role-playing situations in EFL classes. For this purpose, the following table of rubrics was created with the intention of facilitating instructors to identify and reinforce any weak aspects of a student's oral production in the target language:

Table 1 Role-Plays Evaluation Rubrics

Description	5	10	15	20
vocabulary	Insufficient vocabulary knowledge.	Some vocabulary knowledge.	Enough vocabulary knowledge.	Plenty vocabulary knowledge.
Control of grammar	Poor use of the grammar structure.	Some errors are shown in the use of grammatical structures.	Few errors are shown in the use of grammatical structures.	Proper management of grammatical structures.
Fluency	Most of the times the student hesitates when trying to speak the target language.	Some hesitation is evidenced while the student speaks the target language.	Few times the student hesitates while speaking.	The student speaks the target language fluently.

Confidence	The student demonstrates fear to speak.	Several times the student demonstrates fear to speak.	Although at times, the student demonstrates some fear to speak, he/she can communicate reasonably well.	The student is entirely self-confident of what he/she is saying.
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Motivation	The student is not motivated by the activity since he does not show any creativity, innovation, and dynamic body language while participating.	There is some evidence that the student is motivated. Once in a while, the student is creative, innovative and uses some dominant body language.	The student tries to be motivated regardless of the difficult task. He uses some creativity, innovation, and dominant body language while participating in the conversational activity.	The student is enthusiastic about the activity. He/she is sufficiently creative, innovative, and uses dynamic body language.
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Pronunciation	Unclear pronunciation of words.	Some words are intelligibly pronounced.	Most of the words are intelligibly pronounced.	Words are intelligibly pronounced.
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Score: __/20

Note. Adapted from “Speaking Diagnostic Test – EX 1005 (Role-Play Interaction),” by C. Girón- García & C. Llopis-Moreno, 2015. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 8, p. 74.

By using rubrics, teachers will be able to identify precisely what causes make students not being willing to speak, what aspects are necessary to improve to enable learners to participate in conversations, and the procedures required to be followed to overcome the elements that limit the development of students’ speaking skills. In this respect, Espinosa (2015) maintains that the use of rubrics enables instructors to score learners’ performance fairly and precisely.

Methodology

Participants

This chapter considers the perceptions of 17 university students (11 learners from the 5th semester and six learners from the 7th semester), majoring in Hotel and Tourism Management, from a previous study conducted by Rojas (2017) regarding the use of RPs to develop speaking skills.

Context

The study took place at a public university in two ESP courses. The researcher observed that students struggled with oral communication and lack fluency. Past ESP courses had focused on teaching these courses using traditional methods and seldom using communicative activities. Therefore, having students participate in RPs provide them with the opportunity to develop speaking skills and prepare them for their future professional careers (Rojas, 2017).

Instruments and data collection analysis

The researcher applied focus group discussions and individual interviews with semi-structured questions to the participants at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. However, for the present chapter, the author only considered the third intervention. The questions included in the two instruments aimed to analyze the participants' perceptions of the use of RPs to develop speaking skills.

Ethical Considerations

After receiving authorization to conduct the study, Rojas (2017) asked participants to sign a Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study. The participants' identity was protected by the use of codes. In this regard, for the present chapter, FF155LEV and INTM17LEV are codes for two different participants, in which each letter is represented as it follows:

F: Focus Group

INT: individual interview

F: female

M: male

#: identity

5LEV: 5th level

7LEV: 7th level

Results

This section takes into consideration the results obtained from the third and final intervention of the study conducted by Rojas (2017). The results are shown in tables that display students' perceptions on the use of RPs which arose from the questions included in the focus group discussions and individual interviews. The tables also include the comments of the author's present chapter (see Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Outcomes from the Focus Group Discussions (Rojas, 2017)

Table 2 Learner's opinions on the use of role-plays

Category	Code	Learners' comments	Author's comment
Displeasure about Role-Plays	Mispronunciation inhibits dialogue in role-plays	FF155LEV...sometimes I cannot pronounce the words correctly...	In this respect, instructors should consider having students practice and improve pronunciation through recasting and audiovisuals.
		FF155LEV Words are pronounced differently from how they are written.	
		FF165LEV.If we are not sure how to pronounce a word, we should not speak because we might be giving wrong information to the foreigner.	

Note. Participants' answers. Adapted from A1 EFL Students' Insights about the Use of Role-Plays Two English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course to Develop Speaking Skills in the Hotel and Tourism Management Career of a Public University in Ecuador. By M. A. Rojas Encalada. 2017 (Master's Thesis). p. 102. Retrieved from <http://www.dspace.espol.edu.ec/xmlui/handle/123456789/38520>

Table 3 Learner's opinions on the use of role-plays

Category	Codes	Learners' comments	Author's comments
Drawbacks of using role-plays	Lack of vocabulary limits speaking in role-plays	FF85LEV. Most of us don't manage the target language well enough, and therefore we use the translator to look for the meaning of words.	Instructors should present the new terms to students, practice them through a different type of exercises such as matching, filling in the blanks and listening to dialogues or videos, so they learn how these words are used in a real context.
	Dull	FF175LEV... it becomes mind-numbing to talk about something mechanically.	Instructors should encourage students to speak spontaneously about topics they have learned previously and are unusual for them.
	Feeling shameful effects participating in role-plays.	FM25LEV. ...we see many people and tend to forget the dialogues of the role-plays ...	Classes should transmit positive feelings, so students are encouraged to role-play in front of an audience.

Note. Participants' answers. Adapted from A1 EFL Students' Insights about the Use of Role- Plays in Two English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course to Develop Speaking Skills in the Hotel and Tourism Management Career of a Public University in Ecuador. By M. A. Rojas Encalada. 2017 (Master's Thesis). P.109. Retrieved from <http://www.dspace.espol.edu.ec/xmlui/handle/123456789/38520>

Table 4 Learner's opinions on the use of role-plays

Category	Codes	Learners' comments	Author's comments
Advice for the use of Role-Plays	Vocabulary training to enable speaking in role-plays	FF65LEV ...Teachers should help us practice vocabulary. FF135LEV. I consider that it is the responsibility of every student to learn the vocabulary... I think that there are topics that we as students should learn on our own ... Interviewer: What activities do you advise to improve speaking and make them more accessible? FF155LEV. ...Write the meaning and pronunciation of the words in English.	It is advisable to have students work on their own to acquire some background of the new terms before preparing their role-plays.
	Pronunciation training to enable speaking in role-plays	Interviewer: What activities do you advise to improve speaking and make them more accessible? FF55LEV. That you as a teacher help us to pronounce the words that we don't know how to.	Recasting or corrective feedback is necessary when learners mispronounce words.
	Make role-plays enjoyable	Interviewer: What tasks can your teacher do, so that role-plays become more comfortable to prepare? FF135LEV. ...when we are discussing a topic during class, the same day we should perform a role-play or a conversation related to that matter. FF175LEV. ... Dynamic role-plays make students feel enthusiastic.	Instructors should encourage learners to interact spontaneously.

Note. Participants' answers. Adapted from A1 EFL Students' Insights about the Use of Role-Plays in Two English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course to Develop Speaking Skills in the Hotel and Tourism Management Career of a Public University in Ecuador. By M. A. Rojas Encalada. 2017 (Master's Thesis). p. 111. Retrieved from <http://www.dspace.espol.edu.ec/xmlui/handle/123456789/38520>

Table 5 Learner's opinions on the use of role-plays

Category	Codes	Learners' comments	Author's comments
Displeasure about using Role-Plays	Mispronunciation reduces the ability to speak	INTM17LEV. ...I don't enjoy participating in role-plays because it is difficult to pronounce the words.	Recasting or corrective feedback is necessary when learners mispronounce words.
	Lack of peer's support	INTF77LEV. ...Sometimes we don't have our classmates' help.	Instructors should encourage collaborative work among students.

Note. Participants' answers. Adapted from A1 EFL Students' Insights about the Use of Role- Plays in Two English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course to Develop Speaking Skills in the Hotel and Tourism Management Career of a Public University in Ecuador. By M. A. Rojas Encalada. 2017 (Master's Thesis). p. 123. Retrieved from <http://www.dspace.espol.edu.ec/xmlui/handle/123456789/38520>

Table 6 Learner's opinions on the use of role-plays

Category	Codes	Learners' comments	Author's comments
Drawbacks of using Role-Plays	The absence of language understanding inhibits participating in role-plays	INTM37LEV. The participants of the role-play do not understand the target language, and therefore there is not an appropriate interaction. INTF97LEV. We don't understand English well enough, so we don't perform role-plays appropriately.	Instructors should have learners reinforce some knowledge of grammar and vocabulary before having them participate in role-plays.
	Mispronunciation affects speaking in role-plays	Interviewer: What is the most challenging thing for you? INTM17LEV. Pronunciation...	Recasting or corrective feedback is necessary when learners mispronounce words.

Note. Participants' answers. Adapted from A1 EFL Students' Insights about the Use of Role- Plays in Two English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course to Develop Speaking Skills in the Hotel and Tourism Management Career of a Public University in Ecuador. By M. A. Rojas Encalada. 2017 (Master's Thesis). p. 130. Retrieved from <http://www.dspace.espol.edu.ec/xmlui/handle/123456789/38520>

Table 7 Learner's opinions on the use of role-plays

Category	Codes	Learners' comments	Author's comments
Advice for the use of Role-Plays	Make Role-Plays look like a real-life situation	INTM17LEV. It would be beneficial to adequate a stage related to the task to improve role-plays. INTM27LEV. I think students should be more creative. Not only to depend on a script but also prepare a stage according to what is being talked or written. In other words, adequate a little more the context, so it becomes more real. Interviewer: Why are role-plays an excellent option to learn? INTF77LEV. Because there are different contexts to perform role-plays.	Arrange the context where role-plays will be performed, so learners feel as if they are in a restaurant, hotel, airport, etc.
	Teacher's help	INTM37LEV. The teacher should have a constant control. INTF97LEV. I believe the teacher should center on each group to guide them in the performance of an excellent role-play.	Instructors should be a constant guide for learners.
	Pronunciation rehearsal to enable speaking in role-plays	INTM17LEV. I would advise focusing some more on the pronunciation development, so it would be easier when preparing and presenting a role-play.	Use audiovisuals to have students practice the correct pronunciation by listening to native speakers.
	Vocabulary rehearsal to enable speaking in role-plays	Interviewer: What advice would you give to elude memorizing role-plays, so it becomes something more spontaneous? INTM17LEV. I would advise practicing more vocabulary.	Instructors should present the new terms to students, practice them through different situations, so they learn how these words are used in a real context.

Note. Participants' answers. Adapted from A1 EFL Students' Insights about the Use of Role-Plays in Two English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Course to Develop Speaking Skills in the Hotel and Tourism Management Career of a Public University in Ecuador. By M. A. Rojas Encalada. 2017 (Master's Thesis). p. 132. Retrieved from <http://www.dspace.espol.edu.ec/xmlui/handle/123456789/38520>

Discussion of Findings

The following lines discuss the outcomes of what was reviewed in the literature, particularly, the link between Rojas (2017) finding on learners' perceptions of RP, the causes for an infrequent involvement on those types of tasks by EFL students mentioned by Nation and Newton (2009) with the present chapter findings.

According to Nation and Newton (2009), it is vital to monitor learners when they are beginning to participate in speaking interactions and identify those who may not be willing to talk. Therefore, these authors consider five possible causes of students' unwillingness to communicate orally to scrutinize them in this chapter and take the necessary actions to reduce their effects. These causes include "inadequate vocabulary, inadequate control of grammar, lack of fluency, shyness, and lack of encouragement" (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 112). Also, participants in the study conducted by Rojas (2017) mentioned mispronunciation as another cause that affects students' participation in RPs.

Concerning the fact that some students do not enjoy participating in conversations because of inadequate vocabulary, participant FF65LEV mentioned that teachers should assist students to practice vocabulary (Rojas, 2017). In this regard, Seal (1991) maintain that planned vocabulary strategy, which consists of specific and prepared vocabulary teaching, deals on words essential for students to learn to accomplish a particular task in class. About this, participant FF125LEV considers that the instructor should present the vocabulary for next class and have each student make a sentence with the word of her or his choice. Doing this, according to the participant, will enable them to listen and associate the words with the topic of the class and the area of their major (Rojas, 2017). Furthermore, students will not only learn the new words, but they will also have the chance to use them in a context meaningful to them.

On the other hand, if learners do not know the meaning of words, language is not understood, and conversational tasks become uninteresting. For this reason, participants

INTM37LEV and INTF97LEV maintain that interaction during RPs is affected by the lack of language understanding (Rojas, 2017). It is necessary for instructors, when language is not understood, to apply unplanned teaching strategy, which according to Seal (1991) refers to the natural assistance of the teacher when needed during and at the end of the task.

Even though students did not mention anything about inadequate control of grammar in the third intervention of Rojas' research, a previous study conducted by Hinkel and Fotos (2001) promoted grammar teaching in Communicative Approach classes to enable learners to produce plain speaking. These authors support a new view of grammar teaching that combines formal training and communicative language use. In this regard, Skehan Study (as cited in Hinkel & Fotos, 2001) maintain that solely communicative program of study would be inadequate because of lack of grammar instruction that tends to produce fossilization and classroom pidgins.

Similarly, participants on the third intervention of Rojas' study did not mention lack of fluency as a cause for not taking part in speaking activities. However, Nation and Newton (2009) consider that fluency develops when activities are meaningful; classes are students centered developing fluency from previous knowledge, and when learners are encouraged to be creative and move beyond what is being taught in class.

Learning to speak another language is challenging since learners need to communicate the message in an intelligible and spontaneous way. Consequently, many students do not feel confident enough to take part in communicative activities such as RPs. In this respect, participant FM25LEV maintains that when role-playing in front of an audience, they tend to forget the dialogues (Rojas, 2017). Most of the times, students are anxious to perform in front of people because they have not mastered the target language. On the contrary, when learners become more skillful, they are less afraid to speak. The results of a study conducted by Lee (2015) demonstrated that most of the teachers' oral CF influenced positively on the learners' emotional variables helping them to be more proficient and confident during communicative tasks.

Concerning the lack of encouragement to participate in dialogues during RPs, student FF175LEV mentioned that a disadvantage of role-playing is that it becomes dull. With this respect, two participants FF175LEV and INTM27LEV suggested that instructors should motivate students to prepare more active RPs more creatively and enthusiastically to perform in situations that resemble real-life. About this, participants INTM17LEV, INTM27LEV, and INTF77LEV recommended arranging the place where the RPs will be played during class as a real-life situation, so the participation in them becomes more dynamic (Rojas, 2017). In this respect, the results of a study conducted by Garcia-Sanchez (2016) regarding video RPs to boost communicative, collaborative, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) skills in situational video RPs related to their professional fields, demonstrated that students' communication skills developed significantly.

Finally, students mentioned mispronunciation as an essential cause that prevents them from participating actively in role-plays. In this regard, participants INTM17LEV, INTM17LEV, and FF155LEV discussed not enjoying the participation in RP because of the pronunciation difficulties. Therefore, participant INTM17LEV advised focussing some more on the pronunciation development, so it would be easier when preparing and presenting a RP. Additionally, participant FF55LEV suggested the instructor to help students to pronounce difficult words. Phonological recast, according to Sato (2016) reduces learners' mistakes. Another study conducted by Milla and Mayo (2014) sees the necessity of recast to allow learners acknowledge the correct pronunciation of words to be understood by the listeners.

Conclusions

From the discussion above, the author of the present chapter analyzed the improvements that RP need to go through to evaluate speaking skills development in EFL classes more efficiently. For that purpose, the author presented a link between the learners' perceptions about the use of RPs from the study conducted by Rojas (2017) with the causes that interfere on

the students' speaking progress mentioned by Nation and Newton (2009). These causes include "inadequate vocabulary, inadequate control of grammar, lack of fluency, shyness, and lack of encouragement" (p. 112). Because participants in Rojas' study mentioned mispronunciation as an additional reason for not enjoying RP participation, some research on this aspect was also performed.

About learners having an inadequate vocabulary to participate in RP, planned vocabulary strategy that refers to explicit and prepared vocabulary teaching, and unplanned vocabulary strategy that is concerned to spontaneous teacher's help are essential strategies to increase vocabulary development.

Fluency is accomplished when communicative approach classes include grammar instruction to avoid language fossilization, meaningful and student-centered class activities, and when students are encouraged to be creative and perform beyond their capacity. However, shyness is a cause that interferes with learners' fluency, and for that reason, CF is essential to help students become more proficient and confident in communicative tasks. Once learners are fluent and confident in the target language, instructors should encourage them to prepare active RP in situations that resemble real-life, so they are more motivated to participate in tasks that are meaningful to them.

To sum it all up, RPs become a stronger assessment tool when following procedures that help to overcome the causes that interfere with the learners' willingness to speak. In this respect, it is essential to evaluate students regularly through the use of rubrics to identify issues that impede their speaking development and make RP a more efficient assessment tool. Future research needs to be conducted to measure the impact of using rubrics for the development of speaking skills through the accomplishment of communicative tasks.

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03 Chapter Tools for assessing reading comprehension in English as a foreign language programs

Jessenia Matamoros González; Luis Peralta Sari

Assessment tools are the backbone of reading development as they intervene prior to, during, and after instruction; whether it is to keep or redirect the instructional path as well as measuring students' growth. Unfortunately, English as Foreign Language (EFL) settings continue to suffer from starvation of professional development resources for reading comprehension assessment up to this date. The intricacy of reading and limited budgets for research have caused this agonizing scarcity. Furthermore, the unfavorable conditions match the outcome. Discouraging results regarding reading comprehension are evident even after years of permanence in EFL classes. Upon graduation from elementary school and high school, Ecuadorian students' reading levels in EFL programs continue to be very low. Thus, tools to assess students in order to forge actual reading growth seem to be necessary.

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First world countries are well known for their emphasis in reading. These countries have made significant efforts to “unpack” the complexity of reading comprehension for their English Language Learners (ELL). Therefore, a wide variety of resources about reading comprehension assessment has been made available for teachers, including reading assessment tools. However, most of these resources discuss ELLs in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

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It is well known that ELLs in ESL programs and ELLs in EFL programs learn English in different contexts; therefore, they pose differences. However, many of these ESL resources are quite useful for an EFL setting as both EFL and ESL programs have the same purpose, learning a language. The question is, which of these resources are useful for EFL students and what modifications are required in order to meet their needs. In order to find suitable reading assessment tools.

Teachers would have to embark upon a difficult hunt of picking and selecting what is appropriate for their students, as well as modifying those tools according to the needs of their students. Unfortunately, teachers’ busy schedules and lack of expertise could prevent EFL teachers from successfully completing this task.

As a response to this issue, this chapter provides teachers with a compilation of resources for effectively assessing reading comprehension in EFL programs. Throughout the chapter, the readers will see in detail how these resources intertwine with the reality of EFL settings. With this contribution, the authors expect to ease the location of effective reading comprehension assessment tools for EFL programs. This chapter constitutes a source of knowledge intended to shed light on best reading comprehension assessment practices to improve the reading comprehension of ELLs in Ecuador and any other setting that mirrors the contextual reality of our country.

What is reading Comprehension?

Several experts have attempted to define reading comprehension. According to Snow, (2002) reading comprehension is “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. 11). However, this and many other definitions fail to provide a detailed characterization that allows teachers to truly see what reading comprehension is and involves. Experts can’t be blamed for this as reading comprehension is such an intricate concept and its complexity makes this phenomenon only comprehensible. The density of reading comprehension makes mentioning all its components and processes in one single definition, quite challenging. Therefore, we will skip attempting to provide a vague definition that you probably already have, and we will “unpack” what reading comprehension is by isolating and analyzing its most essential elements.

Reading comprehension begins with text. If there is nothing to read, reading comprehension can’t exist. The basic components of a text are letters, words, sentences, and punctuation. The reader must be aware of these elements and how they relate to each other. For instance, readers will use sound-letter relationships to decode words and awareness of syntax to understand the message a group of words

provides. However, reading comprehension is more complex than just decoding words and understanding sentences. Tyson (2014) provided a similar definition to Snow's for reading comprehension. However, she believed it was worth to mention that "information from the text and the knowledge possessed by the reader interact in order to construct meaning" (p. 1). This allows us to see that reading comprehension requires students' background knowledge to process what is being read. For some teachers, background knowledge may seem straightforward. However, we will see that this element requires careful consideration.

Background knowledge is what students already know about a topic. However, to maximize the benefits of background knowledge we should take into consideration the background knowledge of all of the students in a class. Through different grouping techniques students will be able to display their prior knowledge for the whole class to observe. This collection of ideas will provide students with a solidified foundation to understand what they are about to read. This not only supports ELLs on higher levels, but it also benefits ELLs with lower proficiency levels, since it allows them to learn language from their peers.

In addition to traditional background building activities, teachers must understand the relationship between critical reading and background knowledge in comprehension. Critical reading needs to take place when the text reaches certain level of complexity and a higher level of thought is required from the student (Kusiak, 2013). One example of this type of reading is when students analyze the perspective of an author and the message portrayed. Through critical reading the view students have about a topic is deepened and their background knowledge is broadened as a multiple perspective intervenes during critical reading. As you can see, the role of background knowledge cannot be overlooked as it is a foundational component of reading comprehension. Therefore, it will be the teachers' responsibility to include appropriate background activities when necessary or redesign weak building background activities proposed by textbooks.

Text features and background knowledge are not the only elements that intervene in reading comprehension. Even though they are the foundational piece, other processes still need to take place in order to understand a text. In addition to these elements, reading comprehension requires a series of cognitive actions from the reader, which are the foundation of understanding the meaning of a text (Snowling, Cain, Nation, & Oakhill, 2009). These cognitive processes include the application to reading skills and reading strategies to achieve comprehension.

According to Manoli and Papadopoulou (2012), “strategies are deliberate actions, plans consciously deployed by learners in order to cope with comprehension difficulties, whereas skills are automatic behaviors. In fact, what differentiates strategies from skills is intentionality” (p. 820). In other words, strategies are a series of procedures the reader is clearly aware of, whereas skills happen almost unconsciously. For instance, students may need to consciously ask themselves questions in order to make inferences about a challenging text; this is strategy use. On the other hand, when the text does not represent a challenge for the student, inferences will take place automatically; that is skill application.

When reading skills and strategies are discussed, we can't help thinking about metacognition. Metacognition invites students to think about how they learn. In the case of reading, students use metacognition to think about how the comprehension of a text is achieved. Metacognition has been widely used and recommended to improve reading comprehension. Some metacognitive strategies include rereading the text, back and ahead; thinking aloud using context information; asking questions about what is being read; visualizing, etc. Several experts continue to confirm that these strategies improve the reading comprehension of students. The question that comes to our minds at this point is, does metacognition improve comprehension of a text in a second and foreign language?

Although the correlation between metacognitive strategies and reading comprehension of English language learners requires further study, several research articles have already discussed this relationship favoring the application of metacognitive instruction with these students. One research conducted with 130 English students studied the influence of metacognitive training in reading comprehension. 65 of these students took metacognitive training for 5 weeks. The results showed a significant improvement in reading comprehension in the experimental group (Çubukçu, 2008). Likewise, in a study conducted by Tavakoli (2014), a correlation between EFL students who applied metacognitive strategies during reading and reading improvement was demonstrated. As it can be observed, metacognition seems to have the ability to support reading comprehension in other languages.

Diagnostic Assessment of Reading Comprehension and Considerations for Selecting Appropriate Texts

In order to measure the English language level and skills of students, including reading comprehension, high stakes tests are an accurate option. Among these tests we can find TOEFL and Cambridge assessments as the most common in Latin America. These tests include reading passages in which students are required to answer multiple choice questions. However, these tests are quite expensive and many schools and students are not able to afford them. In this case, teachers have to design their own diagnostic comprehension assessments. However, what should teachers consider in order to effectively assess the reading comprehension of their students at the beginning of the school year?

According to Snowling et al. (2009), “a thorough assessment should include tests designed to measure both decoding and comprehension” (p. 4). Therefore, not only the comprehension of text should be assessed, but also decoding is an aspect teachers need to consider during initial reading assessment; especially when working with children since

at this stage many students struggle with sound letter-relationships. When it comes to older students, decoding abilities have already been developed. However, a few times, deficiencies in decoding go unnoticed even for adults. Therefore, it is good practice to listen to each new student read individually, regardless of their age, in order to overrule or confirm any decoding deficiencies.

When it comes to assessing decoding skills and comprehension of meaning, the text must match the students' reading level. A text with a level beyond the student ability does not provide reliable answers as the level of difficulty may interfere with the results. For instance, the level of difficulty of a text could be misunderstood as a decoding difficulty.

How can teachers match texts and students English proficiency levels? The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) developed by the Council of Europe (2001) is the tool many exam developers use nowadays in the EFL world for this purpose.

The Overall Reading Comprehension scale of CEFR provides performance indicators for reading comprehension ranging from the lowest to highest proficiency level. At the A1 level students comprehend very simple syntactic structures and easily recognizable words. At A2 levels students' comprehension stretches to understanding texts that contain common language and basic professional language. Once on the B1 level, students are able to understand undemanding reading about areas they have been exposed to, either for leisure pursuits or work. However, it is only when students reach the B2 level that they are expected to understand texts of different areas. Finally, at C1 and C2 levels, students not only comprehend texts of a wide variety of areas, but also the student is able to unwrap very complex ideas in the text (Council of Europe, 2001).

This scale explains how students in regular EFL programs are expected to transition from social to academic language in reading comprehension. This also explains the way EFL textbooks are designed. These books usually have social lan-

guage only in their readings at the first levels and academic topics only on higher levels. Therefore, beginners have little or no exposure to academic texts in traditional EFL classrooms. However, there is another category in the EFL world which is EFL-Bilingual programs. In these programs students learn English by using textbooks native speakers use in English speaking countries. In these type of books students, regardless of their English level, are exposed to social and academic language. Thus, in order to determine the reading level of students in EFL-Bilingual programs, it will be necessary to include academic texts in the reading assessment, even for students who come from first grades. This will allow teacher to find out to what extent students are able to handle academic texts.

In conclusion, it is quite important to carefully analyze previous schooling experiences of students with the intention to make appropriate assessment decisions. Some teachers may be wondering at this point, how students in the first years of education, who have just started to learn a new language, can understand academic texts. But this is possible as it correlates with Cummins (1979; 1981a) notions of BICS and CALP. Cummins emphasizes that students, regardless of their proficiency language level, and through appropriate instruction, can learn both academic and social language. In addition, we have to remember that even academic texts have different readability levels. For instance, a text about mammals can be written in very simple sentences. If a first grader has been exposed to science topics, he will be able to read the text with little difficulty. Readability of a text can be determined by Lexile levels.

Lexile levels basically measure how difficult a text is in terms of structure and content. They are divided into two categories. The BR_L category (Beginner Reader Lexile) and the L category (Lexile). The BR_L level is used for students at initial reading stages. In this category the highest level is BR1L and the levels will ascend to other numbers. The higher the number in the BR_L level, the easier the text. For instance, a text in the BR100L level will be easier than a book in the BR10L

level. In the second category, the L level, levels start from OL and up. OL to 200L are easier than texts in the 1000L level. The L level is usually for students who have more experience with reading (MetaMetrics, n.d.). Many online reading passages and books already bring Lexile levels which is very convenient for teachers. By using Lexile levels and the CEFR teachers can find more appropriate texts to assess the reading comprehension of their EFL students.

Standardized Assessment Versus Student-Centered Assessment

In the United States, assessment of reading comprehension in most grades is conducted through standardized tests under a multiple-choice format. Students start taking these tests as early as 3rd grade. Standardized tests constitute the main assessment tool, countries like the United States, apply to assess reading comprehension. In order to get students ready, many American teachers print and copy hundreds of online reading passages under the same format. These passages are used to practice for standardized tests, as well as assessing students throughout the school year. All of the American students, regardless of their English proficiency level, have to take standardized tests. However, USA is not the only country in America applying multiple choice tests to assess reading comprehension. For instance, Ecuadorian schools are beginning to apply standardized tests to assess reading comprehension in Spanish. This is an indicator that standardized tests are spreading to other countries. However, this form of assessment has been harshly criticized.

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing has launched a movement called FairTest to encourage test policy makers to rethink standardized testing. FairTest (2012) warned policy makers and teachers about the dangers of standardized tests and multiple-choice formats in education. They believe these tests affect curriculum design and assessment negatively as they prevent application of more student-centered instruction and assessment tools. Most teaching practices,

when standardized testing is in place, aim at passing the test, not students' actual growth. This is caused by the fear to failure teachers face when it comes to standardized testing.

In spite of widespread standardized testing policies, many educators continue to defend practices tailored to the reading comprehension needs of students. These educators advise teachers to learn more about each student in order to plan or design the most appropriate assessment tools for them. Some student-centered assessment tools include reading interest inventories, reading interviews, oral/written retellings, checklists, anecdotal notes, etc. Each selected tool is intended to meet the assessment needs of each student.

One commonality among these tools is that they escape the standardized/multiple choice format, which is the usual piece of paper with a set of questions students answer by filling in a circle with a pencil. They aim at assessing students as individuals, but most importantly they are a reminder that reading assessment should be more personalized. If we are dealing with humans who have different reading skills, background, proficiency levels, etc., our assessment tools must be geared towards gaining a deeper understanding of students' individualities. In this way we will be able to provide more effective instruction.

Tools for Assessing Reading Comprehension

Reading Interest Inventories

Reading Interest Inventories (RII) are student-centered tools intended to find out the type of reading material and genre students are interested in. Some students could be eager to read romance novels while others might be interested in science fiction; and maybe one group is interested in graphic novels while another wants to read long books. Asselin (2004) considers the availability of a variety of texts in the classroom as one of the principles of supporting reading engagement. This allows students to find reading material they might be interested in, to become motivated to read.

However, many EFL settings lack reading resources and work on limited budgets. Therefore, it is highly important to be aware of what exactly students need in order to make the most of financial resources. This is when RIIs come handy as once teachers are aware of students' interests, they will know exactly which type of reading material their classes require.

In addition to finding out what genre students currently like to read, an RII is intended to deepen teachers' knowledge towards students' personal likes that may be connected to reading preferences; whether it is games, TV habits, hobbies, etc. (Bergeron, 2017).

This concept is quite important in places where reading is not a common practice as it allows teachers to know their students and guide them to find reading material by taking other personal aspects of each student into consideration. For instance, if a student has an interest in the discovery channel, he might find interesting reading non-fiction books or articles about animals. However, reading engagement goes beyond personal likes as it is tied to a wider concept which is identity. Identity plays an important role in reading engagement (Protacio, 2013). Each student comes from a context with a series of aspects that have shaped him in individual ways. Customs, beliefs, and personality traits are some of the identity aspects teachers need to consider when designing RIIs in order to find interesting reading choices for their students.

RIIs have worked quite well in ESL settings. How suitable are they for an EFL context? They are actually very appropriate for EFL settings due to their ease of application. RIIs are considered time savers as they can be applied to a group of students, regardless of their size, at once (Mariotti, 2009). It is well known that EFL classes in Ecuador and many other EFL settings are quite large. Any tools applied in this type of setting must not be obstructed by the number of students in a class. In terms of design, the survey should be developed considering the age of students and practicality. Age is important because individuals have different interests at different ages. A survey with content that is not age related,

in most cases, will provide inaccurate results. In terms of practicality, long surveys cause students to feel bored, which compromises the reliability of the answers due to tiredness.

Once students' interests have been identified, teachers will begin the task of finding reading material students are interested in. This is when educators need to consider the reading levels of these texts. We cannot possibly overemphasize the importance of making sure students reading levels match text levels. Difficult texts result in lack of motivation as students are not able to comprehend them (Mariotti, 2009). Even if students find the topic of the book interesting, a book that is too challenging will cause the student to feel frustrated and stop reading.

Assessing students' reading interests will allow teachers to multiply students' reading experiences. This means that students not only will count on the text provided by the teacher during instruction, but also, they will be exposed to additional reading material. Classroom libraries resulting from RIIs will be actively used as students' interests are carefully considered. With constant reading practice and appropriate reading material students' will have more opportunities to strengthen their reading skills (see table 1 for a complete list of topics to design your RIIs).

Table 1: Topics for Reading Interest Inventories

Topics	Subtopics
Likes	Sports Hobbies TV choices Games
Reading preferences	Genre Long texts Short texts Books with visuals Text only
Identity	Family roots Religion Personality traits

Reading Interviews

Reading interviews can be used to find out to what extent students understand a text. Prior to the interview, teachers will choose the reading strategies and skills to be assessed. With this information, teachers will be able to predesign the questions students will be asked. By conducting reading interviews teachers will find out in detail how well students comprehend the text as they are usually conducted on one-on-one basis or in small groups. Reading interviews, as any assessment tool, have to provide reliable assessment results. We have to remember that these results will be used to make curriculum and instructional decisions to improve the reading comprehension of students. What considerations should teachers make in order to apply reading interviews effectively in EFL settings?

One of the biggest obstacles of any activity in which students are required to provide oral or written answers is lack of language differentiation. It is for this reason that Krashen and Terrel (1983) provided us with a straightforward scale that makes teachers aware of what each student is able to do at the different stages of Second Language Acquisition. The five stages of Second Language Acquisition proposed by Krashen and Terrel (1983) are Preproduction, Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency and Advanced Fluency. The lower the level, the more modifications are required in order to assess students.

At the first SLA stage, which is the Preproduction stage, students are not fluent and their comprehension is very limited. Any questions asked by the teachers should require non-verbal responses from students. In other words, in most cases, students will need to point to the correct answer in order to show how much they understand from the text. It is for this reason that Krashen and Terrel recommend the use of visual aids. The more visuals the story includes, the easier it will be for students to comprehend and show comprehension.

Children's stories used in EFL settings usually bring visuals and teachers can easily use these images to assess comprehension. However, that is not usually the case of stories written for older students. It is quite difficult to find beginner reading material with illustrative images for teenagers or young adults in EFL classes. Even though a few publishing companies in the EFL world do offer reading material suitable for very low proficiency levels, that is books with ample visual aids, this material is usually quite expensive and very few schools can afford it. Therefore, in many cases, teachers turn to internet to find free online stories to forge the reading skills of their beginner students. Unfortunately, although beginner stories are easy to find in internet, illustrated ones are also scarce.

Under this circumstance teachers will have to think outside the box and find another way to provide students with illustrated stories. Now that we know that free picture-less beginner stories can be found on internet. Other strategies will have to be used in order to illustrate them. For instance, the school can promote an "illustrator contest" in which the most artistic students will draw the scenes that go with beginner stories. You will be amazed at how well students can achieve this task. At the end of the contest, teachers will gather the illustrated books to use them with students during their instructional time.

The second SLA stage is Early Production. At this stage students comprehend some yes/no and WH questions and can say a few words and phrases. For instance, at this

stage teachers can ask questions like "What is the boy doing? Or "Who is she?" In this case the teacher will expect answers like "cooking" and "Amanda".

At this stage not only the students' comprehension of questions is higher, but also their reading comprehension is higher. Unfortunately, their speech is still very limited and even though they understand more, expressing it is hard. In this case teachers must provide additional tools to allow students to show their comprehension in a more detailed way.

One very useful tool teachers can use in this case is puppets. Puppets can accompany students' short answers in order to show their comprehension in more detailed manner. This would extend the number of tools students count on in order to avoid the language barrier. Story puppets can be made by simply drawing characters and main elements of the story on a piece of paper. Then, these images can be cut out and glued onto a stick. Some teachers may think puppets can be used with children only, but contrary to these opinion, older students really enjoy using them.

The third SLA stage is Speech Emergence. At Speech Emergence students are able to explain ideas using basic sentences. Therefore, teachers at this level can extend their questions to ask, for instance, why something happened on a story or how it happened and expect students to answer orally. At this point, the use of visual aids will also be a form of support, but students will not use them as much since they are able to provide spoken answers. However, teachers need to be mindful students' English may sound broken at different points, this is when tools like puppets can become handy.

At the Intermediate Fluency Stage, which is number four on the SLS stages, students are able to use a more complex discourse. Students are able to provide responses with more than one sentence and sentences contain varied forms of subordinate clauses. At this stage little differentiation needs to take place when assessing students since they are able to provide detailed answers to show comprehension.

The Advanced Fluency does not require any assessment modifications as students' proficiency is near native.

Oral and Written Retellings

In oral retellings, students read a story and then retell it in their own words. Oral retellings are an ordinary form of reading assessment tool in ESL environments. Not only because they allow teachers to see how students have grasped the elements of the story, but also because class sizes are usually

small in ESL environments. A small number of students in class allows all of the oral retellings of a class to be conducted in a short period of time. Unfortunately, that is not the case in most Ecuadorian EFL classes.

Large classes may impede the use of oral retellings. For instance, it can take about 3 hours to assess a class of 40 students through oral retellings. That is because a teacher would need at least 5 minutes with each student to use oral retellings. That gives us a total of 200 minutes to assess these 40 students. In total, teachers would be spending 3,3 hours on oral retellings. Tight schedules don't allow assessing every student of a large class through this assessment tool. On the other hand, in some EFL classes, not all of the students can take oral retelling assessments due to low English proficiency levels. In other words, the number of students who are able to take oral retellings may be limited in some cases. Under this circumstance, oral retells are more likely.

Oral retellings should be used with students who are at Speech Emergence level and above. Students at Preproduction and Early Production levels would not be able to retell the story as they lack the majority of linguistic elements in the foreign language. After taking this point into consideration, teachers will select the students who are suitable for oral. If student numbers are manageable, oral retellings should take place.

Experts, even in the recent years, continue to suggest the use of oral retellings to assess reading comprehension of ELL students. A study conducted by Faggella-Luby, Griffith, Silva, and Weinburgh (2016), showed the effectiveness of oral retellings to measure the reading comprehension of 5th grade ELL students. However, how oral retellings are conducted also determines how effective these tools are. Bernfeld, Morrison, and Wilcox (2013) warn teachers to carefully consider how many passages are used to assess students and the number of teachers who administer the assessment. They suggest using 4 passages and 2 teachers in order to obtain reliable results. Considering these requirements, these types of assessment will be conducted less frequently; although, it will depend on

the number of students who can take the test. The smaller the number, the more frequent the assessment.

A second option for students with higher proficiency levels is written retellings. They also allow teachers to see, through students' writing, the different elements involved in the reading material but this tool saves lots of classroom time since all of the students will be assessed at once. Rog (2003) expressed the following about oral retellings: "it enables the reader to focus on the story rather than the writing" (p. 46). This suggests that written retells could cause some sort of worry in students in order to write correctly with a risk of focusing more on the writing rather than reading comprehension. This is likely as a piece of writing could constitute a documented evidence of their linguistic proficiency. This could affect the results of the assessment. For instance, students could write less to avoid mistakes or they could omit important information from the story because they are too busy trying to remember how to write correctly.

Does this mean written retellings are not reliable assessment tools? The answer is no. We can make written retellings work by having a detailed conversation with the students about what exactly will be assessed through the written retelling. Teachers can even show students samples of writing in which their answers are not penalized due to spelling or syntax errors. That will give the students the confidence to focus on meaning rather than on language features during oral retellings. Students who are aware of exactly how written retells will be graded, perform better on this type of tests.

Checklists

A checklist is usually used as a self-assessment tool. The checklist contains the reading strategies teachers have targeted during instruction for assessment purposes. Students mark the strategies they applied during reading time on the checklist. Through periodical use of this tool, teachers will be able to identify which strategies are being used, which are being used correctly, and which are being used incorrectly.

As a result, student-teacher conferences can take place to find out more and reteach lessons can be planned.

In order to obtain reliable assessment information, checklists are never used alone. About the use of checklists Medina and Pilonieta (2017) suggested the following: “Ask the student to give an example of how the strategy was used” (p. 234). This means teachers not only need confirmation of strategy use through the checklist, but also, they need detailed information of its application. Thus, teachers will need to use additional tools to find out how students are applying reading strategies.

For instance, when reading passages, students could be provided with sticky notes to show how they used the strategy “self-questioning”. The students will use these sticky notes to write their questions. During the assessment, the students will write which questions they asked themselves on the sticky notes. In addition, the students will place the sticky note on the edge of the reading passage; they will place it on the exact paragraph where they found the difficulty. At the end of the assessment, the students will turn in the checklists with all of the evidences for strategy use. In this case, the passage with sticky notes is part of this evidence.

Checklists can be designed to escape the “one size fits all” concept that many educators argue against. Bender and Larkin (2012) expressed that the items on a checklist must match the reading needs of each student. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. With this knowledge, teachers will be able to develop personalized checklists. Getting to know students in depth is the key to developing checklists that suit the students’ needs. Some teachers might think that gaining a better insight into students’ individualities in large classes can be quite challenging. However, this can be achieved by thoroughly assessing students through written diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the school year.

Afflerback (2016) expressed the following about reading assessment: “We want to use assessment that helps shift stu-

dents from an outward orientation, where there is dependence on the teacher for assessment feedback, to one that looks inward” (p. 417). Based on this meaningful statement we can see the power of checklists since they can be used as self- assessment tools to foster independence in students. By using checklists, students can see where they are at strategy use and they can be used to set new goals. Also, by documenting how strategies are used along the way, students will be able to see what they tried previously, what worked, and what can be improved in terms of strategy use (table 2 shows a sample of a checklist with the most common strategies).

Table 2: Checklist for reading assessment

Strategies	How the strategy was used
Make Predictions	
Background Knowledge	
Context Clues	
Summarizing	
Make Inferences	
Ask Questions	

Anecdotal Notes

Anecdotal notes are observational tools aimed at recording details about students’ performance during reading comprehension. These are particularly beneficial to assess students during guided reading. In guided reading the teacher meets with a small group of students in which a reading lesson takes place. In this lesson the teachers instruct students on how to become good readers by teaching them how to apply reading strategies. This is a great opportunity to use anecdotal notes and record students’ strengths and weaknesses. Since guided reading is conducted by the teacher in small groups, teachers will be more aware of how each student responds to reading in terms of comprehension. However, Bell and McCallum (2016) invite teachers to avoid judgements and classifications using anecdotal notes.

These notes should be used exclusively to explain students' performance.

Anecdotal notes are actually quite useful for any group reading activity. The only requirement is for teachers to act as observers of said activities. In order to collect data for assessment purposes in group activities, Cornelius (2013) suggested using a sheet of paper that contains each group seating arrangement. Each student will be represented by a square with the name of the student at the top. Each square must have sufficient space for jotting down notes about the student. The teacher will walk around the classroom observing and writing down the behaviors that require attention in order for the teacher to intervene or make modifications. They can be used to write about the linguistic needs of students, mastery or lack of mastery in terms of reading skills and strategies, interactional factors, for instance, the behavior of a student towards their group partners. All these notes will be aimed at making more appropriate grouping decisions to guarantee the reading growth of all of the students in the classroom.

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04 Chapter **Gaining insights on EFL student performance through meaningful assessment tools**

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Abstract

This chapter presents strategies that are discussed and described as tools to gain insights, develop reflective practice, and improve students' outcomes as well as the teaching environment. This analysis has been conducted through the use of critical action research in public universities in the highlands of Ecuador since 2015, so this chapter reports information from the experience of three educators who have applied these strategies. It offers a simplified way to assist EFL educators in the application of informal assessment practices that incorporates an understanding and valuing of students' previous background, language learning, and lan-

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guage production in an EFL setting. Therefore, the purpose of the information in this chapter is to promote assessment for learning and contribute to the educational field with a set of strategies for English teachers in order to assess their students. In so doing, this chapter aims to promote dialogue among educators about the use of alternative assessment strategies in their daily teaching, and to promote reflection on their own practices.

Key words: alternative assessment, EFL, Ecuador, strategies, assessment for learning.

Introduction

English is considered an essential language to interact with people around the globe. As a result, if language learners achieve English proficiency, they will be ready to communicate with people from different parts of the world and take advantage of multiple opportunities that are waiting for them. Thus, it is time to reconsider the indispensable that language educators' role and it can help learners achieve this communicative goal when applying appropriate assessment strategies to identify students' previous background, learning process, and learning outcomes. Moreover, it is relevant for educators to encourage students to practice English in order to go beyond the established book exercises and start using English in real life situations. As Littlewood (2007) mentioned, there is meaningful language use when learners apply it to advance personally and academically. It is never too late to rethink current educational practices on assessment; therefore, this chapter advocates for the application of grounded alternative assessment tools to help teachers gain insights into students' learning before, during, and after the instruction. As Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) state, it is essential to consider not only the assessment of learning, but also for learning by using alternative strategies to assess students throughout the whole learning process to gather information about their progress. In fact, the information presented in this chapter will bring theory from several researchers (Regier, 2012; Herrera, 2010; Kozen, Murray, and

Windell, 2006; Thomas and Collier, 2003; Ivers and Barron, 2002; Krashen, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978) into praxis by examining strategies that can be used as pre-assessment, formative and summative assessments. Among the pre-assessment strategies, there are Biography Cards and Anticipation Guides; UCME (Uncover, Concentrate, Monitor, and Evaluate), and Extension Wheels as formative assessment strategies; and Portfolios and Video Projects are summative assessments.

Furthermore, it is important to state that English in Ecuador is taught in schools as a foreign language. Consequently, the scope of this chapter is school based, and it is directed to English teachers who work in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Accordingly, this chapter aims to share some assessment strategies to improve their English language instruction and as a way to encourage students' assessment beyond gap-filling or multiple-choice tests. As such, after reading this chapter, the reader will be able to 1) reflect upon the pros and cons of applying these strategies in their own classroom, 2) apply their own alternatives of assessment, and 3) reflect on the further applicability of these assessment tools in their own classroom settings.

The information presented in this chapter begins with a brief description of the methodology used during the research. It is divided into four sections which contain a description, application, importance, and discussion of teachers' perceptions of the strategies in terms of the benefits and drawbacks of implementing them in EFL classrooms.

Methodology

This chapter provides information about how three professors from different universities in Ecuador had gone beyond the traditional evaluation and applied alternative pre-assessment, formative, and summative assessment strategies as a way to gain insights about students' learning, develop metacognitive skills, and lead to positive learning impacts. The application of a critical action research was conducted to see the direct applicability of these strategies to the professors' educational practice and determine their use-

fulness in English language learning. As Gay, Mills and Airasian (2012) state, this research is relevant since it helps teacher researchers analyze how their professional practice is carried out, and how knowledge is gained to enhance learning. Thus, fieldwork was conducted informally since 2015. Data about the application of these strategies was collected before, during and after the instruction by means of participant observation where researchers were not only seeking information, but also taking part in classroom activities and interacting with students. The strategies were applied within regular Ecuadorian university classrooms with students ranging from beginner to pre-intermediate levels. The “conversation as research” (Kvale, 1996), was the principal approach to the fieldwork since it provoked meaningful conversations about the learning process and built informal relationships among students, teachers, and some colleagues who were opened to share the impact of the six strategies that will be described in this chapter. The teachers collected the artifacts produced by the learners and featured the strategies described in this chapter, and also kept a record of the students’ interactions through field observation forms throughout the entire teaching - learning process. Then the artifacts and observation forms were analyzed in order to build a coherent justification of the positive results of applying the different strategies presented in this chapter.

Section 1: Pre-assessment strategies for getting to know students

Overview:

After reading this section, you should be able to:

Define assessment for learning and explain how it differs from assessment of learning.

Describe characteristics of a Biography card and an Anticipation Guide.

Explain the procedure to apply a Biography Card and an Anticipation Guide.

Describe the purpose of using a Biography Card and an Anticipation Guide.

Discuss critical aspects of students' biographies and background knowledge that teachers can examine when applying pre-assessment strategies.

This section addresses some of the challenging aspects in assessing, such as assessment for learning and assessing of learning; and how some pre- assessment strategies can help teachers gather relevant information from students to plan their instruction accordingly to meet their needs.

Assessment of learning vs. Assessment for learning

It is relevant for teachers to know students' progress; therefore, there are several ways to assess students' learning. However, it is necessary to have a clear idea about what assessment of learning and assessment for learning are before applying any assessment strategies in a class. Brown and Aveywickrama (2010) define assessment of learning as practices to assess students' learning at the end of a lesson, unit, or module to see whether the learning has happened or not. Whereas assessment for learning helps seek and interpret learning evidence from students to check where they are in the midst of their learning, and what needs to be done so that students can move forward. As a result, the two strategies Biography Card and Anticipation Guide are tools that can be used to guide teachers' current and future assessments practices for learning.

Strategy: Biography cards

Image 1.1

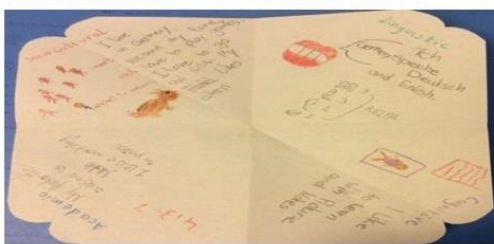


Image 1.2



Source: Student Biography Card adapted from Herrera, 2010

What is a Biography Card?

An informal pre-assessment biography-driven strategy for planning, evaluating and establishing a good rapport, Biography Cards can be used with all students in the classroom. This tool helps educators gather personal information from students as a way to assess their individual characteristics and demonstrate that students are valued as a whole because the cards provide information about the sociocultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic biography dimensions that make them unique human beings, as illustrated in Image 1.1 and 1.2. For instance, in the first section, students provide information about their sociocultural background. It is related to previous knowledge that students gained from their family and community interactions. In the second section, students also share ideas about their linguistic background. It includes students' ways of communication, expressions, and comprehension in their native as well as in their foreign language. In the third section, students provide information related to their cognitive background which reflects their own way of thinking and applying knowledge. Finally, in the last section, students present their academic background related to past experiences obtained from their previous schools' curricula and teachers.

How can you apply it?

This hands-on strategy has four sections, as depicted in Appendix A, and each section provides a space where students can write or draw pictures to describe their personal information. It is important for teachers to start by talking about their own lives using a Biography Card and explain what kind of information is required to put in each dimension – sociocultural, cognitive, linguistic, and academic. For instance, the sociocultural part is the first dimension where students start describing information about their families, countries, religions, holidays and celebrations. When describing information in the cognitive dimension, students need to mention their learning styles, describe the way they learn and how they understand information. It is relevant to

emphasize that sometimes students are not aware of their individual learning styles, so it would be useful if educators take time to help them define their ways learning by applying a survey about multiple intelligences. Students need to mention their language proficiency in their native language and target language to complete the linguistic dimension. Finally, students should describe their school background, including their previous educational institutions, favorite subjects, and past experiences with their teachers and classmates to complete the academic dimension of their Biography Cards.

Why is it important?

Bringing this effective strategy to the classroom allows educators to better understand students who have diverse backgrounds. It allows educators to be well-informed about students' previous studies as well as their families and communities. As a result, one could argue that the application of this strategy invites educators to gain insights about their students and consider them as human beings and not merely language learners in a class. As Thomas and Collier (2003), and Herrera (2010) highlighted, it is essential to analyze the socio-cultural, linguistic, cognitive, and academic components which are considered in a diagram called "Prism Model". It shows students' learning needs that they bring to the school, and motivates educators to uncover information from their previous lives (Thomas and Collier, 1997). Consequently, it encourages educators to create future accommodations, plan the instruction, and provide an appropriate classroom ecology to welcome and help students advance in their education.

What were the experienced outcomes?

This strategy was applied in different EFL settings in Ecuador such as: primary schools, high schools, as well as at the university level. Based on the notes and reflections gathered from the teaching reflection logs used to register daily experiences as EFL educators, it was interesting to see how students enjo-

yed and felt free to provide their personal information. They were engaged in the activity, and they asked us and their peers how to complete each dimension of the Biography Card. They were able to reflect on their own lives and represent them in pictures and words. While we were monitoring our students, we were able to recognize some commonalities with our own biographies. This knowledge was useful because educators realized that they could support students to reinforce their learning when they did not understand a topic. On the other hand, when students were completing the information about their cognitive aspect, educators identified that the majority of learners were visual, some kinesthetic and only a few auditory and logical. By gathering all this information from the students' Biography Cards, educators began to reflect on the necessity to include a variety of classroom techniques to meet their needs. Therefore, educators did not only use visuals, but also TPR (Total Physical Response) activities that require movement and provide audio input, so most students felt engaged with their learning processes.

Strategy: Anticipation Guides

What are anticipation guides?

Anticipation guides are informal pre-assessment tools used to collect the background knowledge of students about a new unit or topic of study (Head and Readence, 1992). As Duffelmeyer (1994) states, this strategy allows students to activate the knowledge that each student brings to the class, and invite them to share their ideas about the target topic. Regier (2012) adds that the use of this strategy allows students to reassess their knowledge at the end of the completed unit. An Anticipation Guide is made up of three major columns, as illustrated in Appendix B. The first one contains the students' responses before receiving the instruction of the targeted unit of study. The second column is a list of true, false or incomplete statements. And, the third one is similar to the first column, but students respond to it at the end of the learning process.

How can you apply them?

It is important for teachers to develop this strategy by focusing their attention on the most relevant points in the content to be taught. When writing the information for the second column, teachers should mix correct and incorrect statements, but avoid the use of confusing information. Teachers may also explain that in the first column called BEFORE, students need to check one of the options, either I agree or I disagree. If students disagree, they then write why they think differently using the gray space below the statement. To have an example of its use in the EFL context, see table 1.1.

Moreover, at the end of its application, teachers collect the papers to make decisions using the gathered information. This strategy should be handed back to the students at the end of the presentation of the content to check the statements again after the learning process has taken place. Students compare their answers in column 1 with the ones in column 3. Then teachers can highlight the critical issues, and provide opportunity for students to reflect on their learning.

Table 1.1
Anticipation Guide

Before		Can and can't	After	
I agree	I disagree		I agree	I disagree
		CAN is used to express abilities		
		CAN'T is used to express prohibitions		
		CAN and CAN'T are followed by a verb in the base form. Eg. I can't eat in class.		
		I use CAN and CAN'T to express my abilities in the pass.		
		I conjugate the verb depending on the pronoun. Eg. I can drive my car. She can drives her car.		
		Etc...		

Adapted from Regier N. (2012). Book One. 50 Preassessment Strategies. Focus on Student Learning - Instructional Strategies Series.

Check the boxes from the section called BEFORE. If you check the box I disagree, use the gray space to write the correct idea.

Why are they important?

The use of Anticipation Guides allows teachers to determine what students know about a new topic before it is taught. Teachers can use the information gained through its application to make instructional decisions about students' strengths and needs. It is also an indirect way of presenting the aims of the unit since the list of statements in the second column portrays the most important points to be covered. In addition, Kozen, Murray, and Windell (2006) believe that the Anticipation Guide is a strategy that helps integrate knowledge and learning in content- area settings. In addition, it is important to recognize that a well-developed Anticipation Guide supports students' critical thinking since it helps them reflect about their learning and the links they make between the previous knowledge and the acquired knowledge.

What were the experienced outcomes?

Applying the Anticipation Guide at the beginning of the unit or a topic allows educators to maximize learning opportunities by highlighting what students knew, and what they did not know about the topic before being taught. For instance, EFL educators who applied this strategy selected the topic: "The use of Can and Can't" to assess whether or not students have information about it. After the application of the strategy, educators could recognize which students had problems with the content, and also what the most problematic content points for them were. This awareness let educators focus their attention on the problematic situations and reinforce the points they already knew. It was also beneficial for the students, because they received immediate feedback and were told directly what the most important points of the unit were. By doing this, they were prepared to focus their attention on confirming or reevaluating their ideas.

Section 2: Formative Assessment Strategies for Interpreting Students' Progress

Overview

After reading this section, you should be able to:

Explain what formative assessments are.

Define a UCME and an Extension Wheel strategies.

Describe the parts of the UCME and Extension Wheel strategies.

Specify theories associated with the application of UCME and Extension Wheel strategies during the learning process.

Explain the procedure for applying UCME and Extension Wheel strategies

Describe five advantages of using UCME and Extension Wheel strategies.

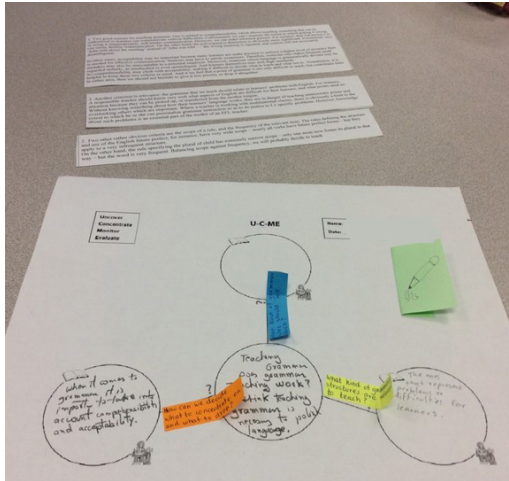
Discuss how to apply your own UCME and Extension Wheel strategies.

This section presents information about formative assessments as a way to assess students during their learning process to interpret their learning growth, and provide immediate feedback to reinforce their knowledge.

Formative assessments

Strategy: UCME

Image 1.3



Source: UCME adapted from Herrera, 2010

What is a UCME?

Another useful strategy is called UCME - Uncover, Concentrate, Monitor, and Evaluate. It is considered an effective formative tool which emphasizes the importance of creating a cooperative learning environment where students work together and learn from each other (Herrera, 2010). Learners develop their language and content knowledge. This strategy supports different points of view from Kagan (1994), Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993) who talk about the importance of using student-centered activities to develop cooperative learning in the class. Similarly, this strategy is aligned with what has been stated by Herrera, Holmes & Kavimandan (2011) regarding the application of active learning strategies as a way to challenge students to work enthusiastically by getting support from advanced peers to make sense of complex information. This strategy also enables educators to emphasize the relevance of designing different grouping

configurations and applying them throughout the lesson; therefore, it is aligned with the grouping configuration proposed by Herrera (2010). This author mentions that it is relevant to allow students to work as a whole group, in pairs, small groups, and individually in order to make sense of the information and show their learning in different settings.

How can you apply it?

To apply this strategy, educators need to divide the class in small groups and provide the template to describe its parts. For example, one main oval is in the center, surrounded and connected by three ovals (see Appendix C). The central oval contains the main information while the others are the supporters. Educators need to activate students' background knowledge about the new topic, so students can share their opinions. For instance, these questions can be applied: Have you studied this topic before? What do you know about this topic? Can you think of some examples of this topic? Then, students record their answers and thoughts in the central oval.

After that, it is relevant to provide time for students to share their individual ideas with their group members before moving on to the next stage. Later on, learners think of some specific questions they would like to know about the topic. After each student has shared a question, they need to write down three questions in each of the lines that connect the central oval with the other spokes, as illustrated in Image 1.3. These questions will be used to guide students' future learning about the topic. Next, educators distribute a reading text about the academic topic, invite the group members to divide up the reading among themselves, and do a jigsaw reading to answer the questions. As the lesson progresses, students work in their small groups to discover the meaning of unknown vocabulary and make connections with the new concepts. It is also essential to explain that students need to take notes from their part of the text and write down only relevant information inside the corresponding spokes that can help answer the assigned question. While students

are working, the teacher's role is to monitor the task and to clarify information if it is necessary. Teachers need to allow time for students to take turns sharing their questions and answers in their groups. After that, students select and recall information taken from their peers' interventions to complete the three ovals from the UCME chart.

Why is it important?

The application of UCME strategy assists educators to elicit students' participation from the beginning to the end of the lesson. Similarly, it invites students to be active participants of their learning process. This strategy activates students' background knowledge, develops reading skills, emphasizes peer interaction, and inspires self-reflection to make sense of the new information. This strategy is also aligned with studies done by Heritage in 2010 which describes the importance of gathering real information about students' cognitive skills to get evidence of their English content learning and language. Moreover, the use of this strategy reduces the TTT (Teaching Talking Time) since students are in charge of their own learning, and they are required to talk, work, and find support from their group members. As a result, students see their classmates as supporters and even though the English proficiency levels of each member of the group may vary, they are able to support each other to complete the demanding strategy.

What were the experienced outcomes?

Educator provided consistent opportunities for students to develop their higher order thinking skills, improve academic development, and integrate their receptive and productive skills. The application of this strategy allowed students to learn in a cooperative way. It also facilitated students' language comprehension because it helped students improve their metacognitive skills and academic language literacy. We also observed that students felt confident working in small groups and enjoyed developing their listening and

speaking skills by sharing their notes. Educators realized that this strategy provides a safe space where some students with a low English level, could advance fast in their learning by having their classmates' support.

Strategy: Extension Wheel

Image 1.4

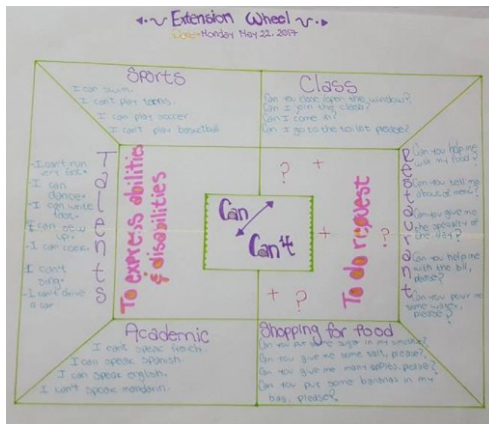


Image 1.5



Source: Extension Wheel adapted from Herrera, 2010

What is an Extension Wheel?

Another Biography Driven strategy, the Extension Wheel emphasizes the continuous assessment process to analyze what students have in their long-term memory before advancing the teachers' instruction. It is used to gather information from students' learning reactions as well as individual and group participation. It invites students to move one step beyond their current learning, so it is also aligned with what Krashen (2002) and Vygotsky (1978) said when talking about input hypothesis theory (i+1) and zone of proximal development (ZPD) respectively. These researchers mentioned that educators should value students' knowledge and use it as support to build the new knowledge about a specific learning topic. Besides, this formative strategy helps teachers to assess students' understanding of a topic, and to check their

learning progress to be able to provide immediate feedback and reevaluate unclear information. As Wormeli (2006) states, formative assessment tools should inform teachers' instruction, and reflect about how to discover what works well in the teaching and learning process and see what needs to be changed or modified.

How can you apply it?

This Extension Wheel is a formative assessment tool for evaluating students during their learning process. There are multiple ways to apply it, as depicted in image 1.4 and image 1.5 from the previous artifacts. Therefore, educators can make some adjustments based on students' needs. For example, they can include pictures if there are students who are considered as "false beginners". It needs to be done as a way to provide comprehensible input through visuals and scaffold students who are in the early production stage, and need to use pictures to create sentences because it is difficult to write long sentences by themselves. Thus, teachers start the application of this strategy by introducing it as a way to extend, assess and reinforce students' new learning. Then, they need to divide the class in small groups, provide a template for each group and explain its parts. For instance, this chart has a central oval for the main topic and three more ovals divided into sections (see Appendix E). At this point, it is useful to emphasize that teachers can add or delete ovals based on the topic they want to assess. For instance, let's say teachers want to practice the prepositions of place, so this topic needs to be written down in the central oval. Then, in the second oval and its sections requires information about examples of the main topic mentioned in the central oval. In our case, there examples are the prepositions of place like: in front of, behind, next to, on, in, etc. Then, in the third oval, students provide information about when to use these prepositions using their own words. Next, teachers give some pictures and ask students to glue and match each one in the correct section of the fourth oval. After that, students write a sentence to describe the picture using the appro-

priate preposition of place. Finally, teachers can ask students to present the Extension Wheel chart in front of the class so that the rest of the students can reinforce their knowledge about the prepositions of time and how to use them in real context.

Why is it important?

This strategy allows teachers to monitor students' cognitive, academic, language and sociocultural development. Conversely, it helps students to get comprehensible input to understand academic vocabulary while having social interactions with their peers as they work together and scaffold one another. It allows students to feel engaged in their learning process, and use new English language knowledge in an interactive way. It also helps educators observe students' progress, identify learning problems, and clarify doubts as soon as they appear in order to provide feedback before students get confused or fossilize a mistake. Thus, the teacher's role is seen as a facilitator who is ready to provide help when it is necessary and motivate students as capable of understanding academic topics when they receive appropriate support. Consequently, students can monitor not only their new learning but also their language use, self-evaluate their English growth, reinforce weak points and improve before moving on to the next topic.

What were the experienced outcomes?

Educators who had applied this strategy could monitor students' language and content growth. They also noticed that students, who were in the early production stage, could advance in their learning process easily because they felt confident to interact in their small groups and contribute with their ideas to complete the strategy chart. Educators also realized that some students needed more practice with the new knowledge before being able to individually show their learning growth. However, educators saw that while they did not provide help to all the groups due to the considerable number of students in each class. However, there

were students who worked as leaders in each group and supported their peers. They simplify the English language explanation so that their peers could understand the topic. As such, educators were able to create a collaborative classroom environment among students, and the whole class could move forward and achieve their academic and language objectives. Similarly, students were encouraged to have visuals, Total Physical Response games, authentic texts, and hands-on activities as support for their learning. As a result, although the English books provided some activities to teach vocabulary and grammar expressions, educators were able to go beyond those activities and look for extra authentic materials to provide their instruction and assess students' progress, informed by the information gathered with this tool.

Section 3: Summative Assessment Strategies for Understanding Students' Learning

Overview

After reading this section, you should be able to:

Explain what summative assessments are.

Define a Digital Video Project and Portfolio strategies.

Explain the procedure to apply Digital Video Projects and Portfolios strategies

Describe benefits of using Digital Video Projects and Portfolios.

Discuss how to apply your own Digital Video Projects and Portfolios strategies

This section presents information about how summative assessments strategies are used to assess students at the end of their learning process to check their acquired knowledge as well as to have a concrete evidence of their constant progress.

Strategy: Digital Video Project

Image 1.6



Image 1.7



Source: Videos collected from class projects

What is a digital video project?

Performance-Based Assessments fall into the category of Authentic Assessments since they require students to demonstrate their learning and understanding through the performance of a task or a series of tasks. They offer a more authentic way for teachers to witness students' growth during and at the end of the learning process than do traditional final tests. Thus, the application of a digital video project is considered as a summative performance-based assessment. Further, it implies the incorporation of technology which is very desirable with our 21st century learners. Through the use of multimedia projects, learners' technology skills and cooperative work are enforced; they need to determine how to organize their new knowledge, and they demonstrate their understanding using media tools (Ivers & Barron, 2002). Particularly, the assignment of the creation of a video encourages learners to work actively and become active and constructive (Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson, 1999). Aksel and Gürman-Kahraman (2014) state that the use of Video Projects in the teaching and learning process is one of the new that has arisen due to the advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). They add that students are engaged in the preparation of their videos in which they practice the target language, and that the activity itself

benefits their learning in different ways. Thus, according to Ivers and Barron (2002) video projects assignments can vary from a simple one-shot video to a complex production as a part of other multimedia projects.

How can you apply it?

As English language teachers, it is very important to assess both the oral and written production of our learners. The former is usually assessed at the end of a lesson through a presentation about the studied topic in which each student should incorporate the new knowledge. However, the authors of this chapter wanted their EFL college students to work on a final product that included the knowledge they had acquired through the course in a more meaningful form by assigning an end-of-course video project (see Image 1.6 and Image 1.7). To implement this sort of project, educators need to make sure students are aware of the assignment from the very beginning of the course, which allows them to start thinking about the real possible applications for the new knowledge. They are required to work in pairs, but educators need to pair them so that weak students can receive support from the strongest ones. When one month is left before the end of the course, students begin to work on the project once educators provide them with the requirements and the rubric to be used to assess their final production. Students have one hour each week to make progress on the project in class. During that hour, they work with their peers on organizing the ideas, and they have to define the theme of their video. The teacher's role at this stage is to provide suggestions for improvement as well as correcting the grammar and vocabulary used in the scripts that students write down to use on the video. During the last week of the course, all the pairs should have their projects and present them in front of the whole class. In this way, educators let students watch their partners' work and share what they have developed and learned during six months.

Why is it important?

Regarding the benefits of media projects in general, different studies have reported that when students work on this kind of projects, their intelligence development may be benefited; they feel empowered since they realize that they are producing knowledge, and their desire to learn increases (Ivers & Barron, 2002). This kind of project also has social benefits in the sense that it helps improve learners' self-confidence since they allow students to interact with each other and produce personal videos that are meaningful to them (Hafner & Miller, 2011). Hafner and Miller (2011) conclude after having students create digital video projects seemed be highly motivational for students because they have been able to reflect on their own learning, and they describe these projects as different, entertaining, challenging, and above all useful final assessment. Similarly, Nikitina (2009) emphasizes the fact that students have more meaningful opportunities to apply the target language as well as to develop strategies that help in their learning process. Studies conducted by Aksel and Gürman-Kahraman (2014) and Peterson (2016) on video projects assignments demonstrate that most of the students had positive perceptions of the effectiveness of these tasks for their language classes and preferred this tool as a type of assessment rather than traditional ones such as essays or individual projects. From this, it is clear that the cooperative work that these tasks require promotes peer teaching, and in the end, all of the students experienced real accomplishment.

What were the experienced outcomes?

Educators who had applied this tool really believe that the assignment of this project as a summative assessment was of great importance and learning for teachers and students. First of all, learners faced a non-traditional kind of assessment that confused them at the first stages. However, they perceived it as a challenging task later on, and they had several ideas on how to accomplish it. Their cooperative work made them progress and communicate in order to agree on

the topic and the content of their videos. They realized that the knowledge they had acquired during the course could be applied to real situations since all the students decided to report on a community issue and were very creative with the language and the content itself. Educators also noticed that shy students felt more confident and comfortable at speaking to a video camera than in front of their classmates. Secondly, educators had the opportunity to accompany the students in the process, but all of the ideas came from them. In our case, technology was not a problem since all of the students knew how to manage this part very well. Indeed, it was good to see that this activity was very productive for students to apply their knowledge in a different and meaningful way.

Strategy: Portfolios

Image 1.8

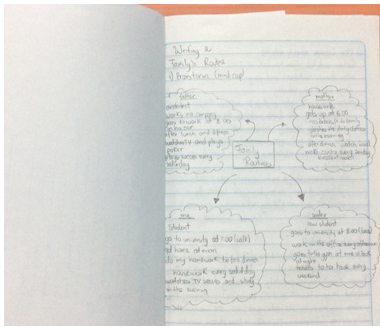
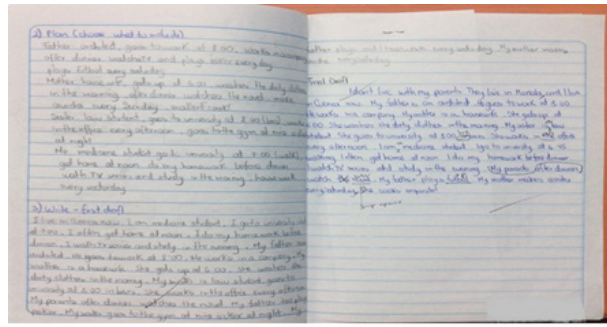


Image 1.9



Source: student's writing portfolio

What are the portfolios?

Portfolios are a type of authentic assessments. As such, it is developed directly from class instruction, offers an alternative to traditional assessment, is consistent and genuine at assessing students' classroom performance, allows students' participation in the evaluation process, comprises measurements that are equally important for teachers and students, and stresses applicable, real-world activities for the

students. In addition, these portfolios are clearly integrated within the teaching and learning process in the classroom, and the students can demonstrate not only what they learn but what they can do with their own knowledge (Tierney & Readence, 2000; Tabatabaei & Assefi, 2012). The main focus of using portfolios is on the individual progress over time. Thus, when they are well-designed, they develop higher-order thinking skills, and learners' self-evaluation is enhanced in order to monitor their growth over time (Herrera, Cabral & Murry, 2013). Therefore, teachers can make use of portfolios to grasp their students' formative and summative learning. Portfolios are used to collect and organize the students' work over time to track their academic development, as it is illustrated in images 1.8 and 1.9. Fundamentally, through the implementation of the portfolio, students are expected to review, examine their learning to select portfolio contents, and assess the competences they have achieved throughout the whole class (Johnson, Mims-Cox, & Doyle-Nichols, 2010; Tierney & Readence, 2000). Portfolios are seen as tools to keep information with a clear learning purpose. They indicate the teaching and learning growth since they represent a file of teachers' and students' work during the whole process. Teachers and students can periodically review them to look for improvements, reflect on experiences, understand new learning insights and advances, and state future objectives (Tierney & Readence, 2000; Herrera et al., 2013). Portfolios allow to get a concrete and visible form their learning grown so that both the teachers and students can assess learning advances and focus on new ways of learning if it is the case (Mosely, 2004-2005; Yancey, 2001 as cited in Johnson et al., 2010). Samples of student work are both concrete and: writing, reading logs, student self-evaluation, audio or video recorders and more. These are indications of how students self-assess their learning process and how they organize their language advances to present in their portfolios in order to meet the stated criteria assigned by their teachers (Herrera et al., 2013).

How can you apply them?

Writing is one of the most difficult language skills for EFL learners, so it is appropriate to implement the writing portfolio as a formative and summative assessment in order to evaluate the progress of each student in this specific skill as well as their final products. At the beginning of the course, students need to be informed of the necessity and benefit of keeping a writing portfolio. Similarly, educators should make sure students know about the importance of going through a correct writing process in order to get the best final piece of writing. Then, there is a necessity of establishing guidelines with the students in order to avoid misconceptions. Thus, the first two writing assignments are developed entirely in the classroom so the students can have clear insights of what is expected to fulfill for each writing task. Then, students go through the writing process from the very beginning, and they are provided with a peer review checklist to give and receive feedback when they have finished their first draft. After making suggestions for improvement and receiving them, students look at their writing again to make the necessary changes that let them increase the quality of their written production. The teacher is always monitoring the students' work and interaction, but students are the ones who are mostly producing, interacting, and reflecting on their own learning. Students document all of their writing productions and include the writing process that leads them to achieve the final product. At the end of the first term of the course, students are asked to bring their writing collection to the classroom and look at the first and last piece of writing. This can be done in a formal manner by giving a list of questions for them to answer related to their reflection on progress or just in an informal way by writing down the questions on the board and asking them to have a discussion in small groups. The second option can be done between students and teachers' dialogues to receive their comments on their own writing development.

Why are they important?

Portfolios can be used for both evaluation and instruction according to Nezakatgoo (2011), who reported the findings of a quasi-experimental research conducted with ESL university learners. It was shown that after using portfolios for teaching and assessing a writing course, students' improved their writing skills demonstrating greater control over their learning and increasing their final examination score compared to the students who were taught and evaluated using the traditional systems. In this study, the components of the portfolio were decided through an agreement between the teacher and the students. In fact, it has been reported by many authors that all students from preschool to adulthood gain a lot when they are able to assess themselves and set their own learning goals (Tierney & Readence, 2000). The main benefits of portfolio use are for the students who have an active role in their own assessment while working with their teacher in the classroom in defining their portfolio. Students are engaged in more complex thinking, but they can support each other through peer assistance, selecting examples, inquiring evidence, and organizing the portfolio. Each student's voice is heard by the teacher and the students develop a more positive view of themselves and invest more in their own growth. A portfolio as an authentic assessment fits easily into today's classroom as an extension of various learning activities. Teachers can assess their students' different activities in the context of their actual work. Additionally, not only teachers but also parents achieve a fuller understanding of students' abilities, interests and development. Therefore, success of using a portfolio in the classroom is based on how it is implemented, and the ability students have to self-assess their language learning progress (Johnson et al., 2010; Tierney & Readence, 2000).

What were the experienced outcomes?

In the context above described, the implementation of the writing portfolio was its use as an authentic formative and summative assessment. The learners were suggested to see it as a documentation of their own learning. At the beginning, it was difficult for them to follow a writing process, but over time they could realize that they were able to follow the process in an automatic way. They got familiarized with the learning, and they could reproduce it without difficulty after a few weeks. Besides, they became aware of the usefulness of peer feedback and asked to do it before writing their final work. Some of their comments to advocate for this activity was that their peers helped them produce clearer writing and that their peers always asked questions that they had not even considered but really had made a difference in the presentation of their ideas. Furthermore, both the educators and students reflected on the teaching learning process. With the documentation of the portfolio, educators could see all the effort that their students had made to write a paragraph or composition and not just the final project, which is what educators tend to look at most of the time. Likewise, students were encouraged by looking back at their writings and have a concrete evidence of their constant progress.

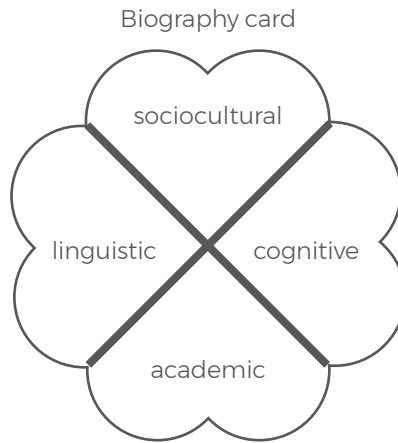
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Appendix A: Biography Card



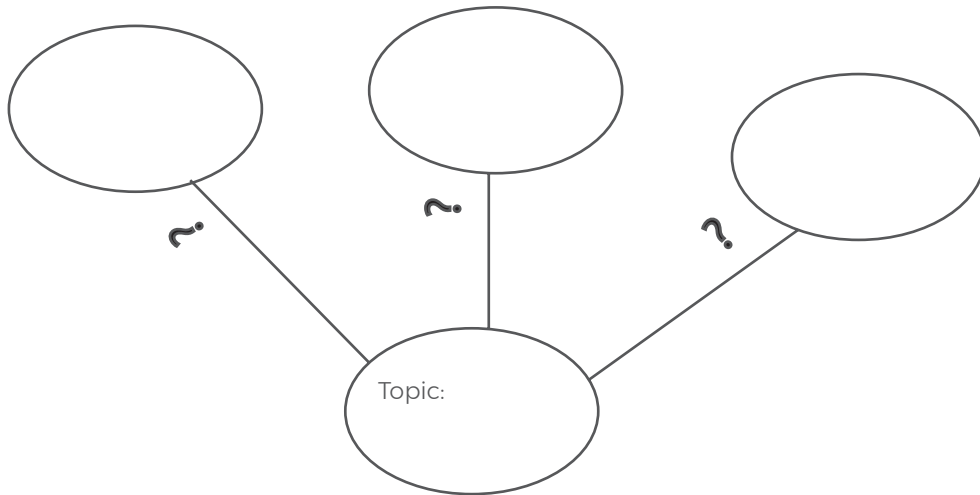
Adapted from Herrera, S.G., Cabral, R. M., & Murry, K.G. (2013). Book: Assesment accommdations for classroom teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Appendix B: Anticipation Guide

Before		Topic:	After	
I agree	I disagree		I agree	I disagree

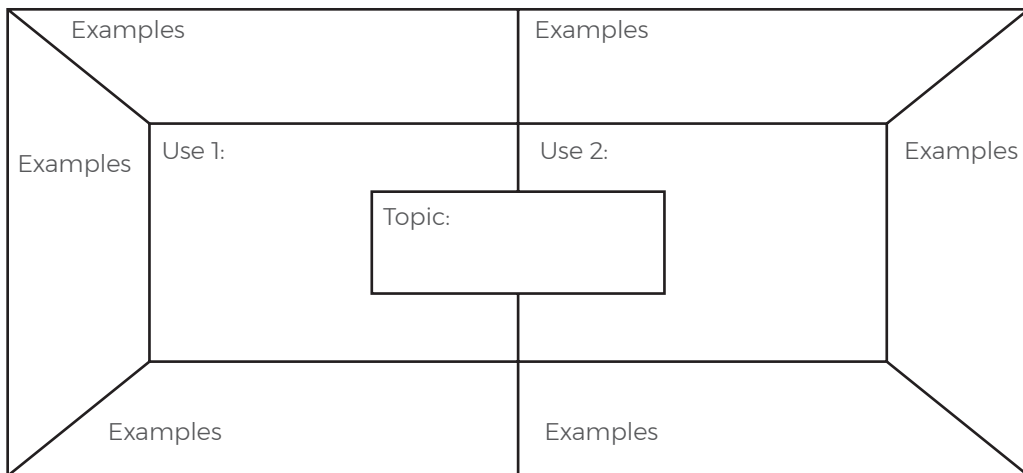
Adapted from Regier N. (2012). Book One. 50 Preassessment Strategies. Focus on Student Learning - Instructional Strategies Series.

Appendix C: UCME



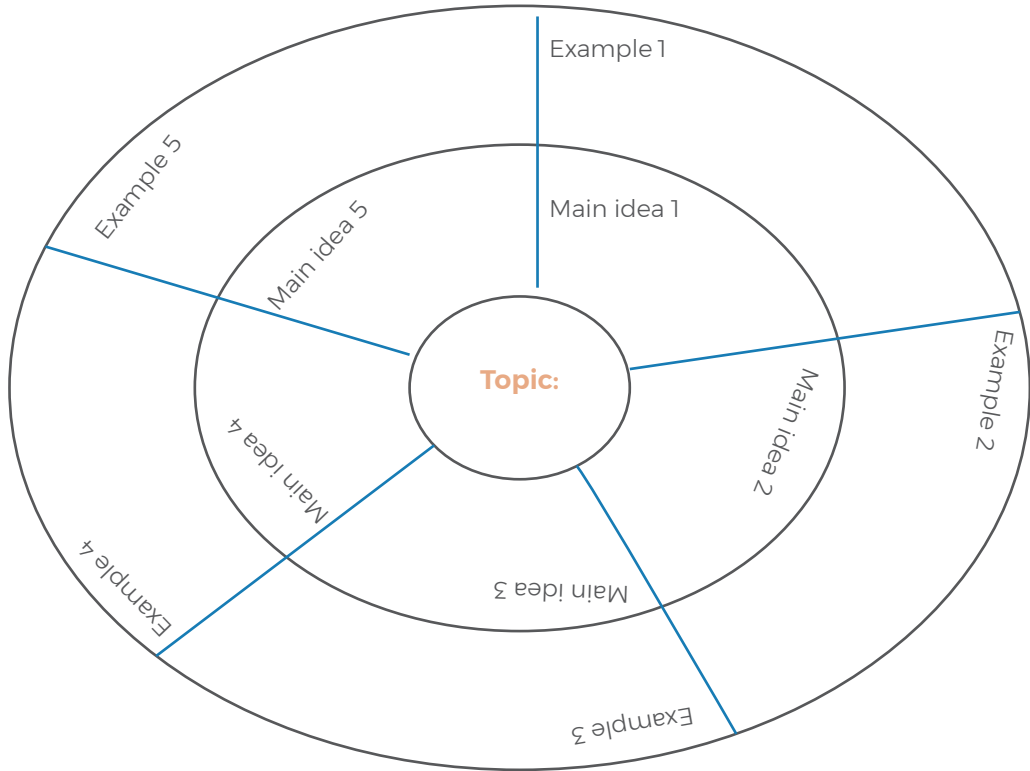
Adapted from Herrera, S.G., Cabral, R. M., & Murry, K.G, (2013). Book: Assesment accommdations for classroom teachers of culturally and linguittically diverse students.

Appendix D: Extension Wheel 1



Adapted from Herrera, S.G., Cabral, R. M., & Murry, K.G, (2013). Book: Assesment accommdations for classroom teachers of culturally and linguittically diverse students.

Appendix E: Extension Wheel 2



05 Chapter Authentic assessment & practical tools to reduce test anxiety

Rebecca Bonarek; Paolo Fabre-Merchan;
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Assessment has historically been seen as one of the most imperative and influential stages within the learning process, necessary to effectively measure students' academic achievement. All individuals, at least once in their lives, have been exposed to testing, which is often recalled as a threatening and stressful experience. Unfortunately, testing cannot be separated from the teaching-learning process; it is a necessary evil. Nevertheless, it can be transformed into a poignant and enjoyable experience rather than an awful and anxious memory.

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It has been proven that test anxiety is one of the most common and visible stressors that are evident during evaluation periods, which normally results in poor academic achievement. Remembering and reproducing a great amount of information produce anxiety and fear for students, considering that most of the time, students' passing ticket is attached to a test, no matter how well they have performed throughout the course. This situation drives us to reflect on the effectiveness of the current grading system, in which the midterm and final formal tests are normally worth at least a 50% of the final score.

In the Ecuadorian context, the Academic Regime Regulation (CES, 2012) establishes that fifty percent of the final grade is based on the final examination. Likewise, at Milagro State University (2014), it has been established that students will be exposed to two formal testing instances during the course, which are worth 60% of their final grade. The majority of university courses are graded considering three aspects: research practices, out-class assignments, and formal evaluations. In considering the United States's educational system, grade allotments are similar. Most colleges or universities heavily weight the final exam's outcome. In fact, some state- or federal government-funded programs administered at the higher education level consider the final exam to be the sole determiner of whether or not a student can be promoted. Litchfield and Dempsey (2015) stated that the majority of university courses are composed of only three practices: "lecture, traditional assessment, and assignments" (p.68), the importance of which are exaggerated, unequal, and ineffective when compared to real-world situations. In cases such as these where class time is spent performing relatively undemanding cognitive work, it makes sense that teachers tend to focus heavily on the test, but student anxiety skyrockets as a result.

Additionally, throughout our experience, we have observed that students' failure is mostly a product of poor teacher training in authentic assessment design. Most teachers design exams according to the book, without taking into account

the mode of instruction given throughout the whole learning process, i.e. these tests do not exhibit true content-related validity (Gursoy & Arman, 2016). In a more harmful scenario, instructors take the tests provided by the book, no matter the real content or strategies which students were exposed to during the course. Those situations become extremely damaging for students, who realize that all the time and hard work performed throughout the course have been obsolete since the instruction received and the assessment tools applied do not coincide.

Within these scenarios, it is imperative that educators transform their assessment practices and challenge themselves to go beyond the traditional grammar based tests, which have a high focus on prescriptive grammar, leaving behind other important aspects of the language (reading, listening, and oral and written production abilities). Hence, applying assessment tools that really demonstrate the use of language in authentic contexts becomes essential in order to have a complete view of students' knowledge and abilities. Assessment needs to include activities that are familiar to students. That is, educators have to consider the application of some practical assessment tools that promote community among students, permitting learning based in confidence, and therefore having optimal outcomes over the whole learning process in a friendly and stress-free learning environment. In this sense, it has been proven that authentic assessment provides students with a friendly way to demonstrate their learning, most of the time using the same instructional tools used in classes to formally assess students' performance and language use. Authentic assessment strategies are not only friendly to students but also allow teachers to construct a general view of students' knowledge, language skills, higher-order skills, metacognition, and processing abilities (Litchfield & Dempsey, 2015).

However, several queries exist related to this controversial topic which need to be resolved to completely understand the assessment world, such as: (a) what is the real problem related to test anxiety? (b) Is there a way for teachers to really

know the anxiety level of our students while they are taking a test? (c) Is there any fair way to assess all the students in the same room yet still differentiate instruction according to their individual needs? (d) Is authentic assessment a valid and precise way to evaluate our students and to make them feel comfortable?

In this sense, this chapter will discuss the importance of determining and how to diminish students' test anxiety. It will also examine the importance of being trained in holistic assessment and not only in testing design itself, which aims to transform the traditional pedagogical belief of teaching to the test into teaching to make the whole learning experience meaningful. It will also attempt to provide readers with valuable information about authentic assessment, which will give practical and contextual tools and scenarios where students can demonstrate their improvement in an anxiety-free and friendly environment.

What is Test Anxiety?

Test anxiety is defined as the behavioral, physical, and emotional reaction that students present when taking a test (Numan & Hasan, 2017). This situation can lead to positive effects, preparing students to visualize themselves performing better on the test; nevertheless, it also can cause negative effects, provoking students to lose interest, show antipathy, and have a misconception of their own abilities and capacities. According to Cizek (2006), test anxiety can be part of the general definition of anxiety; this can be described as the fear experienced when a person feels threatened, and this leads to "physical, emotional, or cognitive reactions" (p. 11).

Numan and Hasan (2017) quote Zeidner's (1998) definition of test anxiety as "a scientific construct, that refers to the set of phenomenological, psychological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation" (p. 2). Moreover, it is also necessary to keep in mind

that anxiety can interfere with the performance of good study habits and increase the bad, such as procrastination (Gerwing et al., 2015), which has been observed as a harmful effect on students' performance and motivation throughout our professional experience.

Causes of Test Anxiety

According to Cizek and Burg (2006), anxiety is not an isolated phenomenon. There are other conditions such as “sex, age, socioeconomic status, family environment, self-esteem, subject matter, cross cultural relationships, and teacher-manifested anxiety” (p. 61) that can be related to this phenomenon, as well as attention deficit problems and other learning conditions such as instruction and learning environment. Thus, teachers have to acknowledge that students have different situations that can interfere with proper performance on a test; teachers need to take into consideration that we cannot evaluate our students only based on summative formal tests without analyzing the educational models and learning environment to which we are exposing our students during those assessment periods.

Aspects of Instruction

Cursoy & Arman (2016) and Cizek and Burg (2006) claim that the influence of standardized tests on how the curriculum and instruction is enacted is one of the most common causes of test anxiety. Cizek and Burg (2006) and Litchfield and Dempsey (2015) explain that some teachers prefer traditional methods and instructional tools instead of implementing innovative strategies since assessment is usually focused on traditional methods. Also, it is important to specify that in certain education systems, the emphasis on certain subjects like math and literacy (taken in their mother tongue) over others like physical education or English is noticeable, which is also evident to students. This is a reality in the Ecuadorian context, especially at the middle and high school levels, in which English is seen as an optional subject, without crea-

ting a major issue if a student fails. These situations increase students' anxiety during evaluation instances since students feel the pressure of being exposed to assessment tools with which they have not been previously familiarized during instruction periods, especially in subjects like math and language.

Aspects of Test Environment and Atmosphere

The environment can be a powerful cause of students' test anxiety and poor performance. Deffenbacher determined that the evaluative or non-evaluative condition prevails over content and skills to be assessed in a test (as cited in Zeidner, 1998). Test anxiety has been observable since evaluations started taking place in the education system. There are some ways to overcome this problem, although it is an inherent condition to tests. Schools are evaluated regarding the scores obtained on standardized tests, and that is one of the main reasons why anxiety appears. These conditions do not only increase anxiety during evaluations, but also negatively affect the whole learning process.

The importance of revealing the causes of test Anxiety

Numan and Hasan (2017) defined different aspects that were disclosed while researching this topic as causes of test anxiety. It is essential to analyze them to better understand how this situation is shaped and to determine if there is a genetic or environmental characteristic that boosts anxiety. Educators need to go through the delineation, specification, testing of the causal mechanisms that include family climate and parent/child dynamics, and finally, the individual response to test anxiety that can be vulnerability or resilience towards examinations.

Effects of Test Anxiety

Educators cannot ignore the negative effects that decontextualized tests produce on the learning process. It does not only affect students but also the learning environment, since both aspects are closely connected. Hence, there are several considerations that all teachers need to be aware of to make the best decisions in the best interests of the students and their own construction of knowledge. This creates a friendly environment to reduce anxiety and to improve students' assessable performance.

Effects on Students

Numan and Hasan (2017) claimed that there are several different positions about evaluations that affect students, which is palpable in their reactions and behavior. Test anxiety can influence students in different aspects; in terms of stress, it will affect students' concentration and memory which usually inhibits students from verbalizing or clearly expressing ideas. Additionally, their self-esteem can be distorted, creating a negative attitude towards the evaluation (Kasper & Petrello, 1998), which is demonstrated through a lack of interest in and apathy towards the evaluations and nervous behavior during testing itself. Those situations can guide students to think that they are not capable of doing well on a test, which usually drives them to commit academic dishonesty. Negative testing past experiences also provoke students to develop more anxiety during current or future evaluation periods (Zeidner, 1998). Thus, any of these situations directly affect students' overall performance and academic achievement.

Effects on the learning environment

A testing experience in any context creates a stressful and anxious environment for students, which can produce some negative effects on the learning process. Decontextualized evaluation reduces students' motivation and active partici-

pation during upcoming lessons since students believe that what is done in class will not support them to successfully complete the course. Furthermore, low motivation and poor interest on behalf of the students directly affect students' assessable performance, active participation, and academic achievement (Fabre & Boroto, 2017).

Test Anxiety and Assessable Performance

Test anxiety is strongly related to overall students' performance, but it depends on the nature of the test (Baş, 2016). According to Ball (1995) and Kasper and Petrello (1998), the test anxiety level will increase or decrease depending on when and how the teacher provides feedback. Zeidner (1998) claims that there is a strong negative relationship that anxiety influences memory, cognitive, and complex tasks performance, and even real-life situations as well as laboratory practices. It means that not only the performance of students is affected but also many other factors can be influenced. Family relationships, environment, genetics, and individual responses can affect and boost test anxiety levels. Hence, it becomes important to understand that test anxiety is not an isolated reaction (e.g. Baş, 2016).

Some out-classroom and school situations also need to be analyzed in order to propose a plan that reduces anxiety during tests. Educators need to have in mind that family and society are aspects of students' biographies which have a high influence on their performance at school (Herrera & Murry, 2011). As teachers, we all can recall an experience in which an excelling student, who has always performed well during formal and informal assessments, suddenly failed a test because of a family or community issue that was emotionally or physically affecting him/her. Based on this situation, teachers need to remember that each student is a microcosm, and that it can positively or negatively impact their individual performance and academic achievement, increasing anxiety and stress not only during evaluation, but also throughout the whole course.

According to Baş (2016), test anxiety can determine students' results in their performance. Anxiety can make students lose focus and produce a negative self-evaluation of their performance. However, Yerkes and Dodson (cited in Sapp, 1993) claimed in their study that test anxiety would depend on the nature of the quiz. Furthermore, students affirm that when they receive immediate feedback, the level of anxiety considerably lessens; however, negative feedback after an evaluation can increase anxiety levels (Ball, 1995).

Additionally, Ball (1995) defined two principles that can help determine the relationship between test anxiety and performance: task difficulty and overqualified students. When a test has a poor level of difficulty and evaluates content that is too basic for students, it will diminish the level of anxiety, and consequently, the results will be positive. On the other hand, when students face challenging tests, which go far beyond their current level of ability and knowledge and include unfamiliar format and strategies, their anxiety will rise, directly impacting their academic achievement. The second principle includes the behavior and reactions of overqualified students. When an excelling student is exposed to a test that does not challenge her/him, the level of anxiety might be almost null, and they will perform well; nevertheless, they will lose motivation and interest in the subject since the course does not require a lot of effort.

Empirical Evidence for the Test Anxiety-Performance Relationship

According to research conducted by Numan & Hasan (2017), there was evidence that there exists a strong relationship between test anxiety and students' assessable performance. The higher amounts of stress, pressure, and anxiety a student is exposed to, the poorer the performance and academic achievement is. To illustrate, a study of Chinese college students taking computer-based spoken English tests found that as students' test anxiety increased, their scores also decreased, regardless of familiarity with the test format or gender issues (Yang, 2017). This research also demonstrates

that test anxiety can deeply influence memory, cognitive and complex task achievement, real life problems and laboratory practices.

Ways of Overcoming Test Anxiety

After discussing the main concepts of test anxiety and its effects and causes, it is essential to develop strategies that can benefit both instructors and students during the learning process in order to diminish students' anxiety and hence improve their performance and academic achievement. There are several options that can be taken into consideration. This section of the chapter includes practical ideas that can boost students' confidence and can help them to overcome anxiety, which are based on the study of the following pedagogical approaches and beliefs analyzed by Zeidner (1998) and Flippo (2008), as results of their research: a) Cognitive Approaches, b) Cognitive- Skill Deficit Approach, c) Evaluation of Cognitive Levels (Zeidner), and d) Preparing Mentally and Physically, and Organizing your Course Content (Flippo).

Tips and Strategies for Reducing Test Anxiety

Familiarizing and guiding students to get alone with the type of test and format they will be exposed during assessment instances is one the main means to reduce test anxiety. "People are often uncomfortable with unfamiliar or with things they don't understand" (Cizek, 2006, p. 109). Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) explain that it is beneficial for students to be familiar with the way they are going to be assessed, and an explanation of scoring criteria is essential to prepare students and provide fair evaluations. In our personal practice, this situation has been observed as a matter of course; all the activities that take place within the classroom are different from the formal assessment tools that are applied to students during midterm and final evaluations which increases student anxiety during test instances. In short, we know our students have the appropriate knowledge, but they have no

idea what to expect on the test. Because of that, it becomes imperative to familiarize students with the techniques that will be implemented to assess their knowledge and skills by the end of the course. These conditions guide teachers to realize that the best practice to overcome this problem is introducing authentic strategies throughout the whole instructional process as well as during assessment instances.

Transforming the Assessment Instances

Throughout the chapter, the fact has been discussed that when students get stressed, an optimal performance will not be obtained since learners are required to complete a test instead of using the learned content and acquired abilities. In a real situation, this condition should impact instructors' minds and their current professional practices, encouraging themselves and others to transform their assessment tools by including authentic activities that can support students in feeling that what they are learning is worthwhile.

Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Velez (1996) acknowledge that authentic assessment is considered to be the use of multiple strategies that require "reflection about students' learning, achievement, motivation, attitudes, or instructionally relevant classroom activities" (p. 4). They are student-centered as opposed to instructor-centered (Güneş, Demir & Balaban, 2015). O'Malley and Velez (1996) propose three effective different assessment strategies.

a.) Performance-based assessment: in this type of assessment, an oral or written construction is developed that can help solve realistic problems. It can also be an artifact or any product that can help to address any problematic situation and that requires students' reactions. There are some characteristics of this type of evaluation such as constructed responses, high-order thinking, authenticity, integration, process and product, and depth vs. breadth (O'Malley and Velez, 1996).

EXPERIENCES & VOICES

My experience with role plays, both as a student and teacher, was memorable and meaningful. As a student learning French in university, we convinced our professor to do a role play as our final: a group of therapy sessions (one for each student in the class) conducted in the guise of Harry Potter characters. I remember being able to use the language. As a teacher, I want encourage that feeling of freedom with my students. Creating the scenarios stretches the teacher's creative muscles, and constructing grading rubric (which is the most daunting part) can be done collaboratively with students, which offers them a measure of the same ownership I felt as a student. Once I see my students start to take ownership of their knowledge of the language, it becomes easy to assess their progress.

Becky

b.) Portfolios: these are the systematic collection of students' work, paper or virtual, that support teacher and school to keep track of student progress and academic achievement records. It is also useful a great source to foster self-education and self-assessment in students, teachers, authorities and parents to be aware of the improvement in the students' learning (Güneş, Demir & Balaban, 2015).

c.) Student Self-assessment: this type of assessment helps students to define whether they want to work and how to do it. Moreover, it develops a sense of self-agency in their learning, helping to construct knowledge consistent with students' interests. Performance and development can be also evaluated while this strategy is being applied (O'Malley & Velez, 1996).

Types of Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Velez (1996) in their book, describe some types of authentic assessment that are commonly used to evaluate English Language Learners (henceforth, ELLs). The information has been synthesized in Figure 1 to provide a better understanding, and also includes the characteristics which are highly beneficial for students and teachers.

Figure 1. Types of Authentic Assessment

TYPES	CHARACTERISTIC
Oral Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Determine English Language Proficiency · Can be accommodated according to the level · Determine comprehension
Storytelling/ Text Retelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Read or listen a story and retell ideas or details · Resembles class authentic and actual activities
Writing Samples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Include different purposes, e.g. expressive, narrative, expository, informative, persuasive · Include different genres · Feature scoring rubrics
Projects/Exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Exhibit work · Can be individual or cooperative · Include an oral or written report
Experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Experiment with using actual materials or expositions of processes · Include an oral or written report · Encompass presentation of materials, hypotheses, methods, conclusions.
Constructed-Response Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Typify performance assessment · Answer questions on reading material · Elicit comprehension and higher-order thinking · Apply knowledge instead of recalling information · Create materials · Use knowledge in real contexts
Portfolios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Collect students' work · Show progress of work to superiors and parents. · Collect samples systematically · Assess with rubrics and checklists

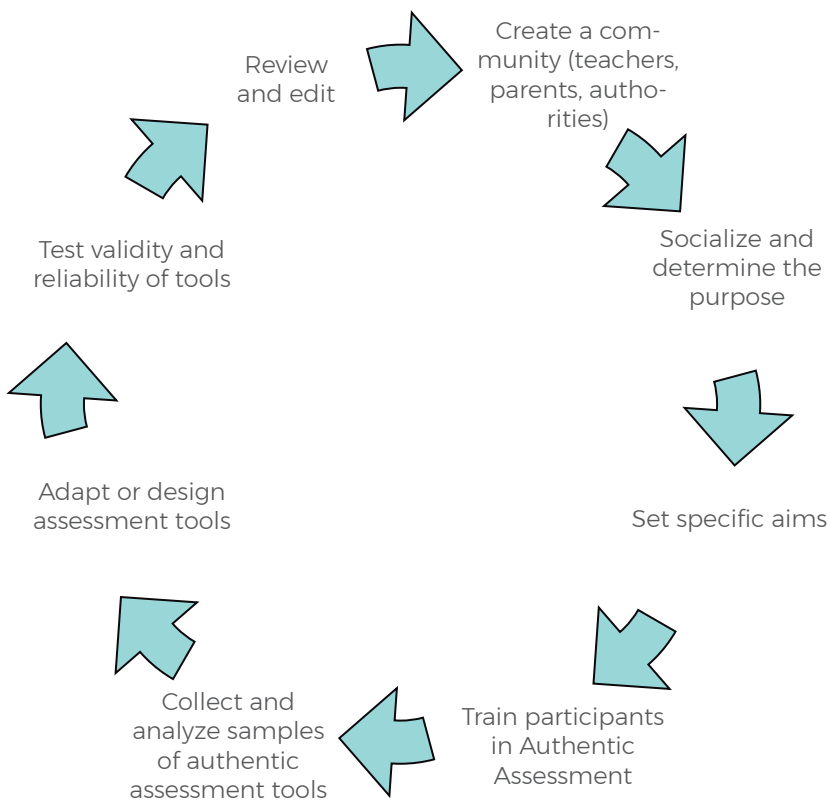
Adapted from: O'Malley J., & Valdez R. (1996). *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Designing Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Velez (2006) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) describe the design of assessment as a whole process that includes other teachers, parents, superiors and authorities. The inclusion of other teachers is essential to create

a network to share experiences and procedures. Parents need to be included since grading and procedures implicit in authentic assessment will be different from traditional assessment and some explanation may be necessary. Moreover, administrators and superiors need to know the change in process to support the teaching practicum. We suggest an eight-step process to design authentic assessment which is summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Authentic Assessment Design: Process



Adapted from: O'Maley J., & Valdez R. (1996). *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

This process is a crucial support to develop authentic assessment tools in any context and subjects, not matter students' levels or biographies. In the following sections of the chapter, we will focus on providing authentic assessment strategies and tools to effectively evaluate students' language skills, considering English as a Foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) teaching. Those strategies will be based on the Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' biographies.

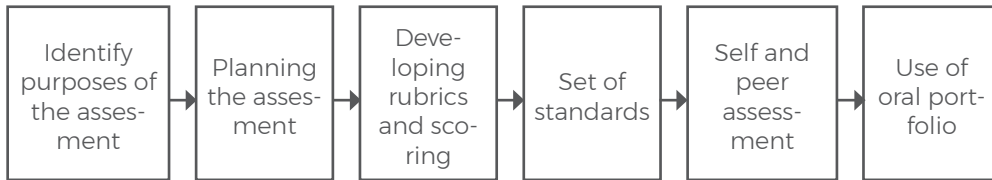
Dimensions for a task and test to be authentic

Assessing students authentically can be considered as a simple way of applying tasks in class with a “real” context (Frey et al., 2012). It is important to take into consideration some other factors that constitute authenticity. This broad classification provides teachers with a great opportunity to create meaningful lessons for the students situated in a context which they might experience in the “real world.” While planning an activity for classes, we have to take into account all the dimensions of developing instructional plans with efficacy. These are described in Frey et al. (2012). The dimensions are context, students' roles, and scoring. Giving students the opportunity to work on activities that are authentic will improve their abilities in many fields.

Process of Authentically Assess Language: Skill by Skill

O'Malley and Velez (1996) also provide a general process to assess CLD students' language use considering the four basic language skills, which is summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Assessing Language Skills: General Process



Source: O'Maley J., & Valdez R. (1996). *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Based on this process, the following lines will analyze, discuss, and provide some effective means and modes to authentically assess students' language abilities and knowledge in an enjoyable learning environment, which aims to reduce students' anxiety and fear when evaluation is being applied.

Oral Language Assessment

Oral language or speaking skills are part of the construction of language. Therefore, it has to be assessed in an EFL classroom. Story/Text Retelling is an assessment tool that prompts students to retell a story (O'Malley and Velez, 1996): students read or listen to a story, take notes, and use them to perform a presentation to the class or an evaluator. This is beneficial since students do not need to have a prolonged preparation. Storytelling is recognized as an authentic assessment tool since people relate stories to others all the time, and students will be trained to develop this skill. It is important to set criteria while considering aspects related to both accuracy and fluency, criteria which need to be prepared and practiced with the students previous to the formal evaluation. Checklists and rubrics can be used here: they bolster confidence within students because the latter know exactly what the teacher's requirements are while being able to map their skills onto predetermined criteria of competence (Litchfield & Dempsey, 2015). It is necessary to mention that this activity should be developed for and accommodate student level and needs (Herrera, 2010), creating an inclusive and challenge environment for all participants.

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

In storytelling, students receive a picture story in a bag, then they need to decipher the meaning of those images, and in upper levels, teachers can ask them to sort and sequence them in any order, so they can start guessing the baseline of the story. For example, if students get three pigs, a wolf, and different types of houses, they may have heard the story already or they can be introduced to it by their friends. The teacher can also include extra pictures that do not have any relationship to the story, so students can also take a known story and create a new one.

EXPERIENCES & VOICES

Story Reteeling provided my students a canvas of oppornuties to not only use the language in a free-anxiety environment, but also they were free to create. Being able to observe students' creativity, progress, and linguistic competences in the language were the most visible outcomes that this activity brought to my teaching practice. Most of the students mentioned that they enjoyed the activity and that it was like having fun, which dismissed the tension of being assessed. It is also essential to mention that more than a 80% of the students achieved high scores.

Paolo

Students' creativity increases through the use of this collaborative activity, but not only that, it is worthwhile to mention that students improve their language since they are using the target vocabulary and expressions corresponding to that reading level. Additionally, students feel more comfortable and engaged when reporting stories; their internal organization is mastered since they need to put together events to create or report the story. Their description of characters and events also develops their critical thinking skills, since they can summarize, evaluate, criticize, reason, predict, and even change the story while at the same time agency is gained when they decide what to do with all the components of this story. Students feel it is their own creation, and it becomes meaningful to them. At this point, the instructor can easily identify if the objectives of the class have been met

without the need of a formal speaking test but instead with the help of an authentic assessment strategy, thereby reducing students' anxiety.

Reading Assessment

As is commonly known, reading is one of the basic skills of language learning. Thus, this skill has to be exercised, mastered, and assessed during the EFL and ESL instruction. According to Shum et al. (2016) and Bourgoin (2014), there is a strong relationship between L1 and L2 literacy. They claim that students with reading difficulties early on in their L1 reading careers will have similar difficulties in their L2.

There are programs that promote and exercise reading skills. Fielding and Pearson (1994, as cited in O'Malley and Velez 1996) claim that for this kind of program, it is essential to maintain 4 different components: 1) a great amount of time exclusively for reading, 2) guided instruction for reading comprehension, 3) creation of opportunities for collaboration, and 4) creation of opportunities for discussion about the reading.

There are different levels of reading proficiency, and we would like to emphasize the level of the students who were exposed to this activity. They were able to read short stories, use reading strategies, and retell the story from beginning, middle and end. In addition, they were able to describe the plot, characters and events; all these skills are attributed to reading level expansion as explained in O'Malley and Velez (1996). Reading logs are an authentic assessment, and they can help students to diversify information taken from the texts; in other words, logs can be specialized to include characters, plot, and main events.

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

Students receive one reading passage or complete book and are also provided with worksheets that act as logs. They can be for characters, theme, plots, setting, storyline, or a combination of the above. This variety can give teachers the opportunity to evaluate students' understanding through small,

ongoing tasks. They can be kept in a folder for the future, so students can have different ways of looking at a story and decoding meaning.

This activity gave our students the opportunity to understand a story not only through event order but by analyzing several different criteria. They received a story and decided to sketch the characters by describing their characteristics. Then students categorized them by commonalities or in what order they appeared within the story. The sequence of events were drawn too using a blank comic strip. Students could play with the characters and move them while retelling the story.

Reading logs give students the opportunity to understand a story not only based on events, but by analyzing characters, settings, and themes. Reading logs can be used in any order; however, it is suggested to start with characters. Students can receive a comic strip and sketch the characters; they can add words to indicate a certain personality or physical trait. They can sort characters by commonalities or by their role in the story. Additionally, students can use a reading log with a time line or with drawings to illustrate the main events. At this point, the instructor can ask students comprehension questions in order to understand how students processed the information (including vocabulary) and if it matches with the content of the story.

It has been demonstrated that the use of logs fosters students' autonomy and creativity; they decide how to draw the characters and how to relate them, while they revise the story events by using information from texts. In the same vein, students are graded in a free risk environment, since the teacher, while monitoring the activity, can highlight and correct any mistakes that take place during process of understanding meaning or reporting the story to someone else. At this point, students' language can be assessed as well: a checklist of the target language can be taken from the text. Finally, this activity demonstrates that students can better remember all the parts of the story (i.e. characters,

setting, plot) because they are actively interacting with and manipulating the text by moving the characters from one event to the other.

Writing Assessment

Writing skills are also part of language proficiency, and it has to be assessed along with the other skills. According to Beaglehole (2014), assessing writing helps the teacher to track opportunities for instruction improvement and course content. O'Malley and Velez (1996) also claimed that there are three types of writing (informative, narrative, and persuasive), and they are important as they guide the type of product that the teacher would obtain from the students. O'Malley and Velez (1996) determined in their book that it is imperative to follow a specific process while assessing writing; this includes pre-writing, writing and post-writing. We will summarize the main ideas of each step presented in their book. First, pre-writing includes the preparation of topics before writing and the outline of the composition. Writing consists of overseeing the process itself, monitoring the use of words, sentences and paragraphs. Finally, in the post-writing phase, the writer edits and revises the piece of writing and makes any final correction to present it to the teacher. After this process, the teacher will grade the final draft with a rubric based on "analytic scoring" (O'Malley and Velez, 1996), which separates features into diverse components to analyze them objectively, therefore allowing the teacher to provide specific feedback. All these previous processes can include technology, and Alexander and Levine (2008) defined this type of activity as Web 2.0 Storytelling, which means the traditional storytelling format can now incorporate new technology such as images, hyperlinks and other media tools. The idea is to enrich stories through the use of different modes in order to convey messages with clarity, making it more accessible.

EXPERIENCES & VOICES

Applying the strategies discussed in this session was memorable, my students were writing their final paper for their English for Academic Purposes II and they were looking for sources. They wrote their topic, title, and a short introduction draft. All students had access to Google doc, all of them helped them checking grammar, and also adding links in order to compile a good data base for their classmates in order to write their papers. Students were engaged during this activity since they realized that having twelve students looking for sources for ten minutes was more efficient than them doing it by themselves for two hours, and fresh eyes helped them to obtain better information.

Gabriela

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

Shared writing is an activity that can be adapted to Web 2.0 storytelling, since students can not only write a piece of text collaboratively, but they are able to use different modes to create a multimodal story that will benefit them and their audience. The instructor creates and shares a Google Doc or Slides presentation, depending on the purpose of the activity. After students are asked to watch a video, read a text, listen to a song, or any source of information that students will manipulate during the activity, they form groups and take notes individually before sharing them with the other members of the group. The task should include writing at least ten sentences for lower levels and even essays for advanced levels; the only condition is that they need to write a piece of text. The instructor assigns one specific part of the document for each group. After the arranged time, students need to revise the first group and make suggestions or fix mistakes. This process is repeated with all the groups; therefore, all students become writers and editors at some point. While this is happening, the teacher projects the text for all to see; thus, all students can see and fix changes and suggestions in real time. At the end of this process, students have their document checked, and they can use it to make a presentation to the rest of the class. During this activity, students can also comment on each other's work.

The main benefits of using this tool is the cooperation and rapport that is generated when students cooperate and feel useful, and when their ideas are taken in consideration by their peers. Additionally, the group that is being checked learns that positive feedback is essential for improvement; they let down some of their affective filter. Moreover, the use of technology facilitates learning and creates a low risk environment because students do not feel they are being evaluated but instead simply building a text and using different modes, which makes the activity even more attractive. Meanwhile, however, the teacher can assess their writing while they are actually producing their text. Instead of waiting to receive feedback until the next unit has already started, feedback can immediately identify their flaws.

Listening Assessment

For Lems (2001) songs and lyrics not only benefit in the listening area; they additionally help to reduce anxiety within the classroom (Li & Brand, 2009) by the fact that students and teachers feel enthusiastic while songs are playing. This creates a positive environment and alleviates stress. It has been reported that the use of music improves pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking, facilitating more natural communication. Music also incorporates cultural aspects that can be analyzed during lessons, giving students the opportunity to understand their culture or another issue of biographies and language through music. In order to understand the close relationship of music and languages, (Li & Brand, 2009) determined that music and languages are developed in the same brain area, and in addition to that, Maess, Koelsch, Gunter and Friederici (2001) in their study that both music and syntax have the same process at brain level. This indicates that the brain will naturally link music with language. Thus, it is important to mention that teachers need to be aware that songs have emotional, cultural, and sometimes obscure connotations which are connected to the acquisition of a language, and therefore, music needs to be selected according to the level/proficiency, age, and interest of students.

Strategy Application & Learning Outcomes

Using songs with students benefits the classroom environment as well as language skills. Some ideas are listed in order to provide a general view of how versatile songs and music are in general. First, students can read the lyrics and sing karaoke; this activity will help students to read and pronounce words that can be challenging to them along with matching words to a specified rhythm. After this, the instructor can provide the lyrics with blank spaces; this encourages students to listen to a specific word and later be able to identify it in real conversation. In terms of vocabulary, songs permit learners to identify the general meaning of a word as well as the specific meaning within the song's context. This is essential when one word can have several interpretations. The teacher can also use songs for instruction or practice of grammar points. For instance, the teacher can pick a specific song that uses past tense to teach regular and irregular verbs.

Using music within the classroom is beneficial since it permits students to learn to pronounce words that sometimes can be particularly difficult for them. This happens because in the majority of lyrics, words are repeated several times. It is easier to play a song and sing it instead of repeating words in isolation. Blank spaces can be used to learn and practice vocabulary as well as grammar points. Students feel less stressed when they are instructed through music because they are not explicitly learning the rules and completing grammar worksheets, or even worse taking a test; they are using the content by singing it.

Conclusions

There is clear evidence that the current assessment tools provoke a high level of anxiety for students, which can be observable in students' behavior and reactions; moreover, it affects students' assessable performance and academic achievement. Throughout this chapter, it has also been demonstrated that empirical data proves effective application of authentic assessment tools lowers students' affective filter which results in effective learning. Thus, it becomes imperative to construct educational communities to collect, analyze, explore, design, and socialize with interactive and friendly evaluation tools in order to reduce the anxiety and fear commonly caused when assessment is being applied. Teaching communities need to be holistically trained in authentic assessment design, and not only in testing itself: determining the evaluation purposes, criteria, and aims (to which teachers must expose students beforehand) is important so that students are not threatened with being exposed to unknown processes.

In addition, it is essential for teachers to keep a personal and professional journal to reflect about the process and mark the most important events during all steps of this process in order to be accurate while making decisions and drawing conclusions after the fact. Educators and students need to keep in mind that this is not only strategy change for the test; in order to have an efficient system, students need to be instructed and assessed using the same strategies and tools. They need to demonstrate they have acquired some communicative competences, not that they can pass a test. Students need to be comfortable and secure in their knowledge.

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06 Chapter The role of ICT in the evaluation and assessment of English as foreign or as a second language

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Introduction

Computers have been used in language assessment since at least the 1960s. However, it was not until the emergence of personal computers, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that their widespread incorporation to most educational institutions took place, especially in the developed countries (Godwin-Jones, 2001 & Davis, 1998).

In the specific case of English as foreign language learning and teaching (EFLLT), the incorporation of computers has triggered a change from traditional pen and paper examinations to others that have fully incorporated the latest technological advancements.

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In this chapter, we will analyze that change and its implications for EFL teachers by reviewing the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies based evaluation and assessment applications for EFLLT, as well as their advantages and disadvantages, current main developments, and their future trends¹.

For that purpose, we have structured the chapter in six sections. In the first one, we will present a summary of the evolution of ICT based evaluation and assessment practices. In the second section, we will discuss the main advantages and disadvantages of these type of practices. The third section will focus on technology and language assessment research, while the fourth will portray the main recent developments in technology, open access software and tools currently available online which can be adapted to design and conduct evaluation and assessment in EFL/ESL courses, organized by abilities or specific purposes. In the last sections, based on the most current available information, we will discuss where the future of Language Learning (LL) evaluation seems to go, and finally, we will present our conclusions.

¹ Since there is no universally accepted definition of the term "Information and Communication Technologies" (ICT), in this chapter, we will understand ICT as a wide term that encompasses telecommunications (such as telephones and wireless signals), computers, software, and audio-visual systems merged in a unified system to access, store, transmit, and manipulate information. We will use the term "computers" only when referring to this specific device employed without an internet connection.

Evolution of computer and ICT based evaluation & assessment in Language Learning

Even though specific ICT based applications have been developed for evaluation and assessment, most applications have been closely linked to the larger field of ICT in LL, and therefore, have followed the same phases or threads. Warschauer & Healey (1998), two of the authors that have studied the evolution of ICT in LL more systematically, initially categorized such evolution in three phases: behavioral, communicative, and integrative².

The behavioral phase, covering the period from 1960 to 1970, basically relied on drill-and-practice computer-based exercises, where the computer was viewed as a mechanical tutor. The best example of this phase was the tutorial system PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) that required a mainframe computer and terminals to run (Warschauer & Healey, 1998, p.57). For Godwin-Jones (2001), two of the best-known early applications of computers in language learning were CALIS, from Duke University, and DASHER, from the University of Iowa. Both applications were designed to support of grammar and vocabulary active drill and practice, rather than formal assessment, and “provided for varied feedback options and recognition/display of partially correct answers” (Godwin-Jones, 2001, p.9).

Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the communicative phase took place with the widespread launching of personal computers and among growing criticisms to the behavioral postulates, especially from cognitive theory which argues that learning implies a process of discovery, expression and development. The software developed during this phase encompassed text reconstruction programs and simulations (Warschauer & Healey, 1998, p.57).

²For Warschauer (2000) and (Motteram, 2013), there is a specific term that should be used when referring to the use of ICT in Language learning, namely: CALL which stands for computer assisted language learning. In this chapter, we will rather use ICT in LL because the latter term is a wider concept.

The integrative phase can be placed between the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was framed within the socio-cognitive approach, which placed greater emphasis on language use in authentic social contexts. In consonance with this approach, computer applications in Language Learning sought to integrate language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and technology more fully into the language learning process.

In integrative approaches, students learn to use a variety of technological tools as an ongoing process of language learning and use, rather than visiting the computer lab on a once a week basis for isolated exercises (whether the exercises be behaviouristic or communicative). If the mainframe was the technology of behaviouristic CALL, and the PC the technology of communicative CALL, the multimedia networked computer is the technology of integrative CALL (Warschauer & Healey, 1998, p.58).

In 2000, Warschauer (2000) renamed the first phase and reconsidered the years for each period, placing the first phase, now “structural” from 1970 to 1980, the second one, communicative, from 1980 to 1990, and the third one, integrative, from 2000 onwards.

These phases, however, should not be understood as fixed ones, but rather as trends that even though were dominant at a given time, currently still coexist, and their concepts and applications are used interchangeably in every day practices.

More recent works from other authors (see for example Hubbart, 2009) predicted at least three major areas of development: social networks, mobile technologies, and virtual worlds. These areas are already part of most people’s everyday lives in developed countries. Thus, we could argue that CALL is in a new phase, and that due to its connection to these technologies, could be called: the virtual-social-mobile one.

Advantages and disadvantages of ICT-based evaluation and assessment

The advantages and disadvantages of ICT-based evaluation and assessment have been extensively discussed and studied by many scholars. In this section, we will summarize some of their main arguments and findings.

Advantages

Many of the advantages associated with the incorporation of ICT to the general field of Language Learning and Teaching can be extended to language evaluation and assessment, such as allowing students to work at their own pace, providing them with tasks appropriate to their own levels and giving them prompt feedback, and using multimedia to present authentic situations of language use (Dunkel, 1999 cited by Chapelle & Voss, 2016, p.3). In the particular case of language evaluation and assessment, other advantages frequently mentioned are facilitating, contextualizing, and enhancing the assessment of linguistic abilities (Winke & Isbell, 2017); conducting individualized analyses of learners' language, errors, and performance that can automatically provide feedback to students. Advantages also include generating reports with detailed information about each student to teachers (Chapelle & Voss, 2016); enhancing language assessment with the integration of automated test analysis, scoring, feedback, as well as conversational agents (Li, Schubeck, & Graesser, 2016); and, constructing assessment instruments that expand the possibilities for student learning beyond the traditional classroom (Chapelle & Voss, 2016, p.7).

In addition, according to the 2017 Horizon Report (Adams Becker et al., 2017) there is a growing interest in using data from learning environments to gather information about learning trajectories since learners' actions reveal their progress.

Furthermore, ICT use multiple modalities to create simulations, or to create or recreate real-life situations that can be used to evaluate students. For instance, learners can easily record their speaking or pronunciation practices and their interactions with other learners; furthermore, the information recorded can be used to assess their progress. They can also display their work online in a blog, and the texts produced can be assessed.

Other advantages linked to more specific applications, are presented below:

- Computer testing: Brown (1992, p.48), states that “the advantages of using computers in language testing can be further subdivided into two categories: testing considerations and human considerations.” Among the first ones, he argues that computers are more accurate at scoring selected-response tests and at reporting scores than human beings are; they allow testers to target the specific ability levels of individual students and they can therefore provide more precise estimates of those abilities. Other advantages include the fact that the use of different tests for each student minimizes any practice effects, studying for the test, and cheating; and diagnostic feedback can be provided quickly to each student. Among the human considerations, he mentions that the use of computers allows students to work at their own pace; they can complete computer-run tests in less time than traditional paper-and-pencil tests; and they experience less frustration than on paper-and-pencil tests because they will be working on test items that are appropriate for their own ability levels. For Brown, students may find that Computer Assisted Language Testing (CALT) examinations are less overwhelming than paper-and-pencil tests, because the questions are presented one at a time on the screen rather than in a test booklet with hundreds of test items; and many students like computers and might even enjoy the testing process.

- Online testing: some of the advantages of online testing over traditional paper-and-pencil testing this type of testing are related to automatic grading, making it more efficient since there is rapid correction and feedback, and less expensive. Moreover, multimedia prompts (i.e. videos) can be used giving the test a more 'real' feeling. Another advantage is that online testing can be adaptive, and this can facilitate rapid diagnosis. (García Laborda, 2007, p. 8 cited by Chapelle & Voss, 2016, p.2).
- Online assessment: it can help teachers to more efficiently evaluate surface features such as spelling and grammar, to perform automated scoring, and to offer students individualized feedback on their writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008, cited by Chapelle & Voss, 2016, p.6).
- Game-based assessment: it allows teachers to assess complex problem-solving processes and outcomes in a digital game-based learning environment that can be highly attractive to students (Zourou, 2014, cited by Chapelle & Voss, 2016, p.7).
- Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment: in a study by Chen, Hsu and Doong (2016) it was found that students moderately developed self-regulation through mobile learning and assessment, and some mobile applications provided alternative learning opportunities for them.

Disadvantages

Brown (1992) presented a list of disadvantages associated with the use of ICT or computers, for language testing. In the following paragraphs, we list those that in our opinion, might still be valid nowadays, at least in many schools.

For him, the disadvantages of using computers in language testing can also be divided into two categories: physical considerations and performance considerations. Among the physical considerations, he highlights the following: computer equipment may not always be available and the amount of material that can be presented on a computer screen is still limited. Regarding the performance considera-

tions, he argues that the differences in the degree to which students are familiar with using computers may lead to discrepancies in their performances on computer-assisted or computer-adaptive tests and might cause computer related anxiety.

Additional disadvantages mentioned by other authors are related to specific types of ICT applications. In a study about Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA), results indicated mixed attitudes from the learners towards MALA regarding fairness and lack of authentic communication (Samaneh & Samaneh, 2016).

Technology and Language Assessment Research

In their review about technology and language assessment research, Chapelle and Voss (2016) identify three main themes: computer-adaptive testing, automated writing evaluation (AWE), and the comparison of computer-assisted language testing (CALT) and non-computerized testing. These themes will be developed briefly in the following sections.

Computer-adaptive language testing

Computer-adaptive language testing refers to the ability of CALT technology to allow for the interaction between the input and the answers given by test takers. Depending on test takers' performance on an item, the computer selects the next item to show, based on an algorithm defined by the test developer. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), a private educational testing and assessment organization that administers international tests including TOEFL, reports the use of item response theory (IRT) to provide for computer-adaptive language testing (Carlson & von Davier, 2013). In general terms, IRT follows a statistical analysis which estimates items' difficulty and other parameters. When the item is tested and a level of difficulty is assigned, it is tagged and used in tests. The advantages of this type of testing include the possibility of personalizing the test to evaluate the learners with items appropriate for their level; consequently,

there are many different versions of the tests, and test time is used more wisely since learners spend time in tasks more tailored to their level.

Computer-adaptive testing is mainly used in formal international proficiency tests. In the classroom day to day scenario, instructors can develop quizzes in LMS platforms such as Edmodo, Moodle, or Blackboard; however, the option of adaptive testing is not yet available. Perhaps an update to include the adaptability bonus would be feasible in years to come.

Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE)

Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) or Automated Essay Scoring (AES) is technology that has been under development since the 1960s (Chapelle & Voss, 2016). It was conceived not merely to assess second language (SL) or foreign language (FL) learners. This type of evaluation requires discourse analysis and parsing among other features, and it is based on natural language processing (NLP). Currently, TOEFL iBT uses an automated writing evaluation engine called e-rater. This engine evaluates writing quality in terms of grammar, usage, mechanics, discourse structure, among other features. This tool is used to support human rating to assess this section of the test. The ETS also offers Criterion, an online essay evaluation system for schools which also uses e-rater and includes peer review, teacher comments and reports. Reviewers of this tool, Lim and Kahng (2012) consider that although it is objective, it fails to evaluate content and argumentations. In a later study of the use of Criterion, Li, Link and Hegelheimer (2015) reported that draft revisions improved. A similar tool MY Access! developed by Vantage Learning, has been perceived to be useful in the drafting and revising process as well, according to research findings by Chen and Cheng (2008) and Grimes and Warschauer (2010). However, students needed their teacher and classmates' feedback as well. Thus, their recommendation is to integrate AWE with a clear pedagogical design.

Other advocates for AWE are Shermis et al. (2016). For them, a main advantage of AWE is the ability to provide formative assessment in the form of feedback, giving the learners the opportunity to improve their texts. The Intelligent Academic Discourse Evaluator (IADE) (Cotos, 2009) and more recently the CyWrite, are two examples of AWE tools created by researchers from Iowa State University which target non-native English writers. Their interest is not only summative assessment as in standard tests, but also to provide formative assessment and inform research about writing.

Automated Speaking Evaluation (ASE)

Speech recognition tools face the challenge of processing speech that varies greatly from person to person. Providing responses to spoken utterances is even more complex since in addition to processing speech, the software decides upon a possible path to follow. Speech recognition tools are currently considered mainstream and are even accessible from mobile devices (i.e. Siri from apple) and as has happened with other tools that were not designed specifically for language learning, language instructors have used them to provide language learners with L2 practice.

Automated Speaking Recognition (ASR) is another area of constant growth that will continue to develop. For this type of tool, natural language processing (NLP) advances in technology are essential. They include a database of representations of sounds from a great number of native speakers; the computer then compares and recognizes the sounds produced by learners to provide a response and even elicit further communication. Thus, the feedback is in the form of an evaluation of what was said; that is, what the computer understood.

As it was mentioned previously, ETS is a global leader in the administration of proficiency tests such as TOEFL. The TOEFL iBT is the internet based test that assesses speaking as well as reading, listening and writing. ETS's Speech Rater scores spontaneous responses. It is "based on NLP and speech-pro-

cessing algorithms are used to calculate a set of features that define a 'profile' of the speech on a number of linguistic dimensions, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical complexity and prosody." ("Automated Scoring of Speech," 2017). ETS adds that human raters review the scoring to validate it and that they are working on the inclusion of more extensive NLP features to analyze discourse.

Computer-assisted feedback in the form of audiovisual displays of pitch and intonation has been used to provide pronunciation practice. Hincks (2002) summarized research studies about the use of this signal analysis software with positive results. She observes that even though the tool is helpful, feedback provided by instructors is imperative. In this type of pronunciation practice the learners can see the display and intonation of the utterance to be practiced as well as their own, comparing how similar or different they are and then have the possibility of trying it again (i.e. Visi-Pitch).

In addition to the tools developed to help language learners practice their speaking skill before taking a high stakes test such as the one described previously, there are several software applications free of charge that can be used in a classroom setting scenario. A recent study by Li et al. (2017) about the use of the ASR device IVI (iFlytek Voice Input) to improve pronunciation in Chinese English learners yielded positive results. In this study learners would read a text aloud and the app would transcribe it. They could then visualize their pronunciation mistakes. They were then asked to work on the sounds that presented problems and repeat their practice after a week. A drawback that they observe is the fact that the tool lacks an option to check the pronunciation of the words.

Developments in Computer Assisted Language Testing per Language Skill

Nowadays any of the four basic language skills can be assessed using a computer. Technological advancements and innovations have enabled educators to assess all four skills whereas only receptive skills (listening and reading), were feasible in years past.

Speaking Evaluation Tests and Tools

ICT and language assessment have been associated as far back as the 1980s (Suvorov & Hegelheimer, 2014) and ICT usage has only continued to evolve. Regarding speaking assessment, institutions have access to standard language tests that can provide feedback on students' speaking abilities. Some of these tests are offered by renowned institutions in the language testing field and they include, in addition to the already mentioned TOEFL IBT® (Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Test), the BULATS (Business Language Testing Service) Speaking Test, the BEST™ (Basic English Skills Test), the Versant™ English Test, and the PTE Academic™ (Pearson Test of English) (Suvorov & Hegelheimer, 2014). Nevertheless, these tests have a considerable cost and are not available in most locations, which make them impractical for the average language educator. Fortunately, there are many commercial and open-source tools to evaluate and assess speaking abilities that are available to English teachers everywhere.

Regarding the commercial options, there are some speaking evaluations tools that teachers can use. Some of the most recent options include tools such as the Speech Rater Engine in the TOEFL Online Practice Test by ETS and the iSprak Online Pronunciation Feedback web application.

As it was mentioned, the Speech Rater Engine is a system to evaluate spoken production of speakers who will be taking a standardized speaking test such as the TOEFL® test. This system's results have shown a close correlation to the results of human-based evaluation of speaking (Bat & Yoon, 2015).

Another commercial option for educators is the iSprak Online Pronunciation Feedback web application. This application was developed by Dan Nickolai at Saint Louis University to integrate a formative assessment tool with emergent speech recognition and speech synthesis technologies (Adams, et al., 2017). This application works through the Google Chrome web browser and although initial use is free to use, extended use of the application requires a subscription.

Duolingo is a widely known and popular application for language learning. English teachers can use this application to grade students' oral proficiency since the application scores the students' oral skills and pronunciation. Additionally, this application offers the Duolingo English Test. This test offers a trial version which is free, and a paid version that includes a certificate. The Duolingo English Test is relatively new but some authors suggest its usefulness in improving students' oral abilities as well as confidence (De Castro, Da Hora, & Pinto, 2016). Also, according to Ye (2014), it can help students improve their TOEFL scores.

There are other free and open-source applications created for educational purposes that can be used for language learning for assessment purposes. The Voki Ed application allows teachers and students to create talking animated avatars using their own voices. The Voki Ed application does not have speech recognition tools. However, it allows users to create an animated avatar that resembles their appearance, and then to record a spoken message using the recording feature. Voki Ed is free to download, but most of its features require users to buy the full version or to make in-app-purchases. Nevertheless, the advantages of using Voki Ed are many, such as the fact that students may access it through a computer or a handheld device. In addition, it appeals to different personalities, and since students are able to share their videos, they can also get feedback from their classmates (Yona & Marlina, 2014).

The EduSynch platform is a website and application that allows students to practice their language skills in preparation for a TOEFL exam and similar English Language Stan-

standardized tests. Educators can take advantage of its free speaking evaluations and professionally developed interface. In addition, if students so desire, the EduSynch platform also offers oral and written examinations grades by professionals for a fee.

Finally, there are applications that were not originally intended for language teaching, but are experiencing a considerable growth in language teaching and assessment. Among these are web platforms such as VoiceThread, the WeSpeke web application, and speech-coaching applications like Orai.

VoiceThread (Stannard & Basiel, 2013) is one of the platforms with the fastest rising popularity in spoken formative assessment in English language learning. It is cloud-based and thus does not require the installation of any software. It offers educators a platform where they can communicate using video and audio messages as well as text. The interface allows for group interaction and contains an analytics section that enables teachers to monitor the activity of their courses. Unfortunately, VoiceThread is a platform that requires a license to be used and thus it is not an option for educators who do not have financial support from an institution.

A second rising option is the WeSpeke platform. This platform was created with the purpose of language learning and speaker interaction. The WeSpeke interface allows learners to interact with other speakers around the world with written messages and audio recordings and it is completely free to use. It also has courses in which students can enroll to further practice their skills and it is a platform where teachers and students can practice their speaking abilities outside the classroom (Mora, 2016).

Finally, the Orai application is another rising star in speaking practice and assessment. Orai works with different speaking tasks, such as tongue-twisters, repetition, and text reading. The app can be used by both native and non-native English speakers – machine learning is used to interpret a range of accents, and while it is still in its early stages, it has shown promising results (Simon-Lewis, 2017). The app is still recent

(it was launched in April 2017) and it is only available for IOS devices at the moment, but it is likely to migrate to android as well in the near future.

Evaluation Tests and Tools for Writing

The evaluation of written language can be aided by a variety of technologies. In addition to the standardized tests for writing abilities mentioned earlier there are also the COMPASS® ESL Placement Test to evaluate students' essay writing abilities (Suvorov & Hegelheimer, 2014) and the DIALANG test to determine students' approximate writing proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference (Winke & Isbell, 2017). Nevertheless, like in the case of speaking evaluation, these tests are available for a fee and not accessible in all locations, which might be impractical for the average language educator.

Another commercial tool to evaluate and assess writing abilities is also available to English teachers. The WriterPlacer by Accuplacer® is offered from The College Board. This tool asks students to write an essay which is then graded by an automated system. This system is used to evaluate students' writing skills in their native language as well as in English.

The Grammarly web add-on is a tool that allows the users to check their grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and to detect plagiarism. Grammarly is an automatic editing tool like Word from MSOffice. This add-on, although recent, has been reported to be well-received by many higher education students (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016) and to help in the learning of certain grammar structures such as the passive voice (Qassemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016). Finally, though Grammarly has a free add-on option for users, it is much more limited in use compared to the premium version, since it includes fewer assessment options.

Regarding free and open source options for the evaluation and assessment of writing abilities there are several options as well, including the Paper Rater website, the WhiteSmoke grammar checker, and the Language Tool Proofreading Service.

The Paper Rater website is an online platform where students can submit their written work and have it analyzed. The website checks the text's grammar, spelling, word choice, style, and vocabulary, and it also looks for plagiarized text. The text simply must be copy-pasted into a text box in the website and the feedback is generated automatically. Additionally, the Paper Rater website checks the texts according to the grade of the person submitting the paper. Although Paper Rater is mostly used to check students' writing skills it is also a popular tool to check for plagiarism (Masic, Begic, & Dobraca, 2017).

Another non-commercial alternative to assess writing is the WhiteSmoke grammar checker. This software checks spelling, grammar, punctuation and plagiarism. It is compatible with MS Office Word and it works in several operating systems as well. This site offers a free trial and users can purchase the full version. There is also a web version of the software as well as a mobile application. In addition to the features mentioned earlier, this mobile application seems to improve students' self-assessment (Qazzemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016).

Finally, the Language Tool proofreading service is another free assessment option. Language Tool is an open source option that allows users to identify grammar and style issues such as verb tenses, concordances, use of transitions, spelling errors and word choices. Though this option has more limitations than the other two mentioned above it is the only one that is genuinely free and it is compatible with many open source software options.

Reading and Listening Evaluation Tests and Tools

Reading and listening comprehension evaluation tools are more varied than their counterparts and they have been around for much longer. Educators may find reading and listening comprehension material with just a simple google search. However, good quality and appropriate material is not as easily found. Fortunately, there are several ICT tools

to help assess reading and listening comprehension, and unlike the tools mentioned for speaking and writing, these assessment tools include more non-commercial options. It is also important to note that there are very few commercial ICT tools that focus solely on the receptive skills, since these can be easily integrated into other assessment tools and applications, and anything that a commercial tool offers also can be obtained with a free or open-source ICT tool.

Among commercial ICT tools to evaluate reading and listening skills there are several applications that allow teachers to assess comprehension. The Test Prep Review website, by Mometrix®, is a standardized test repository. It offers educators and students access to a plethora of test simulators such as the Accuplacer test, SAT, Pearson Placer, and COMPASS test among many others. This website offers complete practice tests with answer keys to be used by individual students and as class activities. The only disadvantage is that it does not offer automated review on the site. However, since it provides a great variety of tests, it remains a popular option among educators.

Several non-commercial options to assess and monitor the reading progress of students are available with a simple online search in a web browser. One of them is the website Exam English. Here, the users can find multiple choice exams and obtain feedback about their selections.

Authoring Tools

Software designed for purposes other than language learning has been used to develop exercises to evaluate language learning (i.e. Hot Potatoes). Chapelle and Voss (2017, 2016) argue that technology applications should allow instructors to design their own tests using accessible authoring tools. In other words, these tools should be easy to use, flexible and allow for customization. Some commercial and free authoring tools to consider for the evaluation and assessment of language learners are described in this section.

Quizlet is currently considered one of the most popular web-based and free mobile application that provides the tools to create flashcards, games and quizzes. Interestingly, it was created by Andrew Sutherland when he felt the need to learn vocabulary for a French course. Even though it does not include speech recognition features or automatic writing evaluation tools, users, students or instructors can easily create quizzes and share them for free. Developers also included a listening feature and now users can listen to text as well. Quizlet offers subscriptions for a fee for teachers and students to include other features such as personalized instruction.

Learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle, Blackboard, Schoology, Edmodo, and the like, have a tool included to create quizzes tailored to the course needs. These tools tend to be comprehensible and include help features to assist users in the design of their assessment. However, if a LMS is not used in the course and instructors and students have access to online resources, instructors can use Google Forms to create a quiz for free. They would have to enter the answer key and use the Flubaroo plugin to store grading in a spreadsheet, send each student their grade, and then be able to see who obtained a low score, among other features.

Where does the future seem to go?

Technology trends have an impact in general in education and consequently in ELT. The 2017 Horizon Report published by the Media Consortium since 2002, presents research about the technological developments that have changed and will continue to change education in a period of five years. According to this report, adaptive learning technologies and mobile learning are already being used. The “internet of things” which consists of enabling devices to transmit information and capture and analyze data (i.e. Apple watch, Fitbit) and Next-Generation LMS which will have to include modern user experience (i.e. mobile, social, gamified, personalized to user’s needs) will probably be adopted in two

to three years and artificial intelligence and natural user interfaces (i.e. speech recognition, touchscreen interfaces, eye-tracking) will take four to five years to be integrated into the mainstream. The technologies that, according to Adams Becker et al. (2017), we consider currently have and will continue to have a strong impact on ELT and consequently, on evaluation and assessment, are the following: adaptive learning technologies, mobile learning, Next-Generation LMS, and perhaps, Natural User Interfaces (NUIs).

Adaptive Learning Technologies

Adaptive learning systems, also known as intelligent tutoring systems (ITSs) consider students' learning styles, strengths and weaknesses to propose the learning activities and exercises each student should perform. This way, learning profiles are studied to design and implement specific instructional environments.

An example of this type of technology is EduSynch, a free adaptive training tool for English language proficiency exams such as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, and Cambridge. With the help of this site, students take mock tests and their real-time performance is tracked. This information is then used to take corrective action in the classroom and the type of practice students need outside of the classroom as well, to help them improve their language proficiency scores.

Mobile learning

Mobile technologies, such as mobile smartphones or tablets for language learning and teaching, are becoming more mainstream than emergent. Nowadays apps of all kinds are offered through Google Play and App Store, and anyone with internet access can be connected, which has helped in making them become a necessary product. Many language learning apps can be found. However, these mainly offer vocabulary practice through drilling exercises with immediate evaluation. According to Godwin-Jones (2017), even though these devices offer more advanced communication oppor-

tunities, these are usually not utilized. Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) apps such as Duolingo and Memrise, however, are integrating multimedia and exploiting the connectivity feature by giving the opportunity to practice with a partner, another user from any part of the world who is also interested in learning. Perhaps a way to assess students is by having them reflect on the reaction of their partners; if they were understood or if they had to recast their message. The British Council also offers apps for smartphones (<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/apps>) and will probably redesign them as technology improves. Perhaps the future will lean more towards taking advantage of features that give users the possibility to create their own game or Augmented Reality (AR) projects using online software such as LearnAR and ARIS (Godwin-Jones, 2016). This gives instructors and students ownership and more control of their own teaching and learning.

Instagram and Snapchat are apps that can be used in language learning even though their roles are as social media applications (Rosell-Aguilar, 2016). Similarly, Youtube's affordability for uploading and sharing videos from individuals and media corporations has been part of its attraction and thus is also widely used in language teaching. According to Lidsky (2017) the YouTube app has more mobile views than the desktop version. They rely on algorithms that analyze users' preferences. Additionally, they are working on immersive video which allows for Virtual Reality features that have had an impact on education (i.e. Discovery VR YouTube channel). Language learning examples can be seen in the LearnEnglishinVR YouTube channel.

Smartphones and tablets are becoming more affordable and their features have been improving. It is likely that they will continue to be devices used by language learners. As Godwin-Jones (2017) points out, it is the instructors' duty to take the opportunity to use them to encourage language learning. Game-like applications used currently in these devices provide instant evaluation and designers are constantly improving the features and exploiting technology affordances.

Next-Generation LMS

Learning management systems (LMS) or Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) such as Moodle, Desire2Learn, Edmodo, Schoology and Blackboard are now commonplace in higher education and more recently in K-12 as well. Through these systems students have access to course material and they are also able to submit assignments, take quizzes, check grades, interact with instructors and peers and so forth. The idea of a New Generation of LMS comes from the need to integrate more flexible features that allow for evolving students' needs and more opportunities for formative assessment, among others. Ideally, these LMS would not only be administering students' information but also tracking students' behavior and a variety of assessment types to optimize teaching. Acrobatiq is one platform developed by the Carnegie Mellon University's Open Learning Initiative that allows for adaptive learning technology to provide a more individualized learning experience.

Natural User Interfaces

According to the 2017 Horizon Report the constant development of natural user interfaces (NUIs) will impact education. Learners' expectations are constantly evolving and NUIs can provide gesture sensing technology, speech recognition and haptics or the way of applying touch (tactile) sensation and control to interaction with computer applications. According to Underkoffler (2010), an interface designer and inventor who has been consulted for the development of science-fiction movies, NUIs will be included in next generation computers. The NUIs are already being used in smartphones and the potential of having this pocket computer with NUIs capabilities will change the way people have access to resources. Prototypes of educational games designed with NAUs such as Kinect have been tested and proven to be effective (Shapi'i & Ghulam, 2016). In a language learning scenario, automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology is already being used to evaluate pronunciation quality (Neri, Cucchiari, & Strik, 2003; O'Hear, 2010). Duolingo is an app

already including this feature. NUIs will continue to improve and have the potential of fostering new ways of presenting information, new ways of learning and thus, new ways of evaluating and assessing language learners.

Conclusions

The incorporation of ICT in language assessment has followed a similar path to that of language learning in general, which has meant a growing incorporation of ICT based applications in assessment and evaluation practices. This incorporation has brought many benefits to the field of assessment. One of the most important has been the implementation of more personally oriented practices. So, it is reasonable to assume that, as new technologies emerge, language assessment will also continue to evolve and adopt the new developments to move towards more personalized assessment practices.

For instance, the possibility of carrying pocket-sized computers such as smartphones and tablets with internet access is no longer just a dream and students are now able to use the tools by themselves to create their own study guides (i.e. quizlet) or access online practice exams. In the near future, ICT applications and advances will grow at an even faster pace and will improve the tools currently used in language evaluation.

Even though limitations of automated writing evaluation (AWE) and automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology are still prevalent, since technology is constantly evolving, these tools are expected to become more accurate and reliable. Furthermore, they will be integrated with adaptive learning technology and game-like applications for a more individualized experience that will bring about new ways of learning and evaluating. Thus, the need of more specialized professionals who understand the new roles of technology in language learning and assessment is still prevalent. We hope this chapter contributes to that understanding.

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07 Chapter Literature circles, Google apps and corrective feedback to assess language learning

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Abstract

This action research aims to contribute to the improvement of the evaluation stage of educational projects that use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This project involved undergraduate students' English language acquisition process in Ecuador, during 2016-2017. The participants were 120 students of in the teacher education program. They took part of English language practices that combined Literature Circles and Google Apps to improve participants English language level. The results showed an improvement in all the participants' English knowledge levels. It also introduced a creative, more authentic and intrinsically motiva-

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ting assessment process using ICT, which took into account learners' context and class' goals to generate constructive feedback.

Keywords: Assessment, English as foreign Language learning, Higher education, Information and communication technology, reading.

Resumen

Este trabajo de investigación-acción tiene como objetivo contribuir al fortalecimiento de la etapa de evaluación de los proyectos educativos que utilizan las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación. Este trabajo se centra en el proceso de adquisición del idioma inglés de estudiantes universitarios en Ecuador, durante el período 2016-2017. Los participantes son 120 estudiantes del Programa de Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera de una Universidad Ecuatoriana. Participaron en prácticas de idioma inglés que combinan círculos de literatura y aplicaciones de Google para mejorar el nivel de inglés de los participantes. Los resultados muestran una mejora en todos los niveles de conocimiento de inglés de los participantes. Como resultado, también se introduce un proceso de evaluación creativo, más auténtico e intrínsecamente motivador utilizando las TIC, que tiene en cuenta el contexto de los alumnos y los objetivos de la clase para generar una retroalimentación constructiva.

Palabras clave: evaluación, inglés como aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, educación superior, tecnología de la información y la comunicación, lectura.

Introduction

Teachers need to find creative ways to make sure that what is being taught is being done in a way that really makes students learn it. Both, analog and digital education apply evaluation processes which have to do with type of content. Skills, however, are sometimes harder to assess than content whose assessment involves remembering or repeating activities.

Thus, the present work is motivated out of the necessity of improving assessment procedures on the usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) highly required in the education of the century XXI. Such assessment procedures should not only be limited to effectively discovering if a student has learned; it should also reveal how students are learning. In this concern, Google Apps can be very useful because their flexibility to be accessed since a smartphone or tablet (Nevin, 2009).

It is clear that much of the assessment that is done in education today is composed of standardized and multiple-choice tests therefore, teachers are obliged to look for new ways to bring to the surface the information that these standardized tests can't (Brown, 2004). Also, tests and assessments traditionally have been applied to identify and measure the contents students do not know; instead, those instruments should measure the contents students have somewhat mastered (Jabbarifar, 2009).

Thus, following Brown's (2004), Bain (2007), Jabbarifar's (2009) and Najeeb's (2013) lines of thought, this chapter intends to aid teachers in creating more authentic and intrinsically motivating assessment procedures that take into account learners' context and class' goals to generate a constructive feedback, but also keeping in mind learners' personal interests and motivations (Noels, Clement & Pelletier, 1999; Lamb, 2002)

In the same sense, the evaluations must also reflect the needs of students because these are connected with their performance. Teacher need to be careful in not using this information in isolation to make decision in terms of indication of ability or acquisition of knowledge as imprecise (Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009). Here, the action of evaluation benefits students and teachers in different ways. They will have the certitude that progress is being made and that learning truly is taking place in the classroom (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013).

Teachers are invited to reflect upon what they are doing to assess their students and be critical as to the question "does it really work?"; in this sense, an attitude of openness to new ways of assessment should be adopted. Among the many routes that can be taken, this chapter suggests technology as an

ally in the creating and application of pieces of assessment that help determining whether a student is effectively learning and informing the teachers what is working really well or determine the changes to be made. The questions to answer in this work are:

Is assessment capable of revealing what students had learned and also, how they did it?

How efficient can be ICT in the assessment process?

Assessment as teaching and learning process

Scholars as Miller (1995); Wilson (1999) and Dixon (2011) view assessment as a crucial point in the teaching/learning process. It is central as this process requires of actions and instruments that provide data about how the learning goals set are being reached by the learners; based on this, new curriculum and assessment decisions are made.

This way of looking at assessing is grounded in reflection and learning from teaching, which promotes innovative ways to teach and a true desire to improve the lives of their students (Stone, 1998; and Withford, Ruscoe and Fickel, 2000) present some of the aspects that they discovered as deficiencies revealed through portfolios: Home and family conflicts, Decreased levels of self-esteem, Family isolation, Frequent and disruptive moves from one place to another, Reduced exposure to language (especially academic language).

Teachers and students are actively involved in a process that requires the application of permanent evaluation (Barootchi and Keshavarz, 2002). They combine efforts that produce information and a dynamic that yields results. However, "the anticipation of a test is almost always accompanied by feelings of anxiety and self-doubt-along with a fervent hope that you will come out of it alive" (Brown, 2004, p.1).

Since educational institutions should seek that students incorporate the knowledge, skills and values gained in the learning experiences so that it has a meaningful use in their lives, teachers are challenged to think of ways to create tea-

ching and learning scenarios, resources, content variation and activities that resemble reality (Miller, 1995; Fox, 2008). They are called alternative assessment or nontraditional assessment to separate from the classic, standardized multiple choice tests (Chung, 2008; Rodrigues, 2010). Some examples are observation checklists, portfolios, individual and group presentations, videos, game-based and performance-based assessments can be mentioned as examples of alternative assessment.

However, teachers “develop, administer and analyze the questions, they are more likely to apply the results of the assessment to their own teaching. Therefore, it provides feedback on the effectiveness of instruction and gives students a measure of their progress” (Jabbarifar, 2009, p8). Then, they center on the learning goals, understood as declarations of “observable” knowledge or abilities at the end of period (Dixon, 2011). In this sense, assessment affects grades, placement, and progress as well as curriculum. These ways of assessment make it possible for students to demonstrate their talents, interests and potential involvement with their true dream (Astika, 2014).

Assessment also reveals information that escapes the limits of the classroom, such as students’ health care and intrapersonal relations at home. Kids that do poor in class, have limited socialization or problems paying attention in class may be an indication that their families do not have access to healthcare services or that their parents may be going through economic or emotional hardships (Herrera, Cabral and Murry, 2013).

When teachers understand that their performance is enriched by looking beyond the performance level, reflecting on the possible causes that, in the first place, lead students to perform at such or such level. In addition, formative assessment can occur “naturally and most often implicitly” (Dyer, 2015, p1.) because learners move from practice to final performance, but during the process (writing drafted and revised) learning occurs. It is also the result of students’ self-motivation and autonomous learning (Cevallos, Intriago, Villafuerte, Molina and Ortega, 2017).

Extensive Reading through Literature Circle

Learning a foreign language requires that the students that take the challenge have opportunities to use the language (Krashen, 1981; Oxford, 1989; Intriago, Villafuerte, Morales, Lema, Echeverria, 2016).

The type of reading that is involved in the Literature Circles is known as Extensive Reading. This is not something new; Elley and Mangubhai (1983) conducted reviews that approach reading since the 80s. This type of reading, which consists in reading great amount for pleasure, has served to meet the individual needs of some learners, and helped in the acquisition processes of a foreign language, especially in the area of activating high frequency vocabulary.

To Collie and Slater (1987) this type of reading stimulates the mind of the readers and causes them to enter in mental dialogues with the text, which promotes the creative development of the readers. Davis (1995) proposed extensive reading of graded books, also known as readers. These books are modified in such a way that learners can understand the content in them. Such modification allows students to engage with the text in ways as similar as they would engage in reading of the same type in their native language.

Harmer (2001) commented that learners need to get exposure to the language repeatedly as this is a key condition for learning it. In countries where English has a status as a second language, learners find opportunities to be exposed to the language in natural and abundant ways.

Conventional Literature Circles are known as discussion groups organized to promote in learners' reading habit as a collaborative act (Obregon, 2006). In the Literature Circle participants assume roles (artist, connector of bridges, diction detective, leader of the discussion and reporter) stimulating their participation, exchanging ideas and understanding (Sanchez and Contreras (2012).

Other benefits of this practice can be: Participants learn to discuss about literature, they speak about the stories that have been read as a group, participants can link literature to their

personal experiences, they achieve a deep understanding of the text, learn to give opinions and respect opinions of others, learning from the different points of view, they link literature with other areas of knowledge such as writing, spelling, style and rhetoric, to know more about the world and contexts of English speaking countries.

Thus, Hames (2012), uses the term peer review to refer to a scrutiny and critical assessment by experts can use to increase emphasis on openness and transparency when dealing with the evaluation of the text. To Najeeb (2013) “Learners need to be able to be aware of and understand their own learning styles and to use these to their advantage” (p. 1242).

Mutwarasibo (2013) made innovative contributions about the importance of collaborative work in writing practices, preparing students for the job market. Regarding Literature Circle, Nguyen (2013); and Aydin and Yildiz (2014) have conducted studies about innovations for collaborative project writing because, It is essential to have students work collaboratively promoting they learn from each other. Typically, literature reading is recommended to readers whose language proficiency can easily dispense the use of a dictionary (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2017).

On the other hand, in countries like Ecuador, students don't have as many opportunities to use the language for communication (Villafuerte, Carreno, Demera, 2015). However, extensive reading has as its main purpose to read texts completely giving priority to the message over the form. The point is to have a general idea about what is being read.

Literature Circles is a learning strategy that provides students opportunity to get in contact with the language (Intriago, et al, 2016). Literature Circle allows students to produce language when they assume diverse roles (artistic, police of the courtesy, researcher, etc.) before the text. (Villafuerte, Intriago and Romero, 2017). Finally, it is necessary to remember that reading and writing are perhaps the most common communicative ways used by university students. Here, the quality, clearance, and exactitude of a document is highly relevant (Rojas, Villafuerte, Soto, 2017) and it is necessary to work on its improvement.

Google applications as language practice tools

When the technology is used appropriately can be excellent companions for both summative and formative assessment in the foreign language acquisition process (Nevin, 2009).

Thomas (2011) argued that Apps on the cloud computing had reached a significant usage level, especially in higher education because they allow teacher and learners to work on a same document at the same time under an active collaborative dynamic. So, Cloud tools can enhance engagement among teachers, students and researchers.

Zhuang (2010) argued there are, dozens of Apps that in the form of games allows teachers to very quickly get a general view of the learning in the class. In additions, Google Apps offer to learners and teachers communicational tools that can be used as collaborative scenarios to introduce, practice and assess any language topic (Railean, 2012).

To Ferres and Piscitelli (2012) the webs 1.0 and 2.0 have facilitated users' interactions and collaborations tools on internet; however, Asterhan and Hever (2015) argue that, teachers and students need help to develop educational projects using the social network sites (SNS). Thus, the experience of Villafuerte, Carreno and Demera (2015) in the Ecuadorian context ratifies that an educative project can promote the learners' responsible participation in open social networks sites as Facebook, surpassing the stage of marking -I like- and taking learners to a process of knowledge production through the exchange of opinions on the usage of a foreign language.

In the same sense, Jones (2015) used Twitter to innovate a University literature class in United States. So, "30 undergraduate students soon embraced Twitter as a collaboration tool to improve learners' attitudes toward readiness for class discussions" (Jones, 2015, p. 91).

Scholars as Cabero (2015); Villafuerte and Romero (2017), etc. argued that Information and Communication Technologies and Internet offer multiple opportunities to bring to the classroom the culture of English speaking community through the

use of authentic reading and listening materials produced around the world. Those materials can be adjusted to the learners' language level. For beginning students, the modifications may include adding images and pre-reading vocabulary activities before starting the first chapter. ICT can help learners to improve the contact with the target language. In this sense, "Websites and resources that involve interaction (chat-rooms, wikis, blogs) on internet should be encouraged and made clear to the learners as complementary" tools for improving their process of learning (Cevallos, et al., 2017). Finally, assessment activities can also be adapted to ICT tools. They had showed to be an educational partner with the power to stimulate the participation and overcome the barriers as physical distance (Cabero and Ruíz, 2018).

Test and Assessment types

Karen Hume (2008) in her book covers four purposes of pre-assessment. She argued that pre-assessment helps teachers to determine which content, skills, and strategies are needed by the students to meet the expected goals, clears up any misconceptions or partial understanding that students start with, tells teacher how to group students so they can learn well, tells teacher which types of activities will best support various learners.

Test

Tests are a source of anxiety and as such may be responsible for underperformance (Krashen, 1981). However, Tests exist because the following reasons: to understand whether a student is ready to go to next level, to know about problematic areas, to figure out what the students have learnt, and to compare the students (Harris and McCann, 1994). Among the types of tests that exist are: pretests, class discussions, questionnaires, student interviews, creative student work, K-W-L charts and others.

In the tests presented in the form of multiple choice or true or false questions, the distress can be minimized and offer an opportunity for objectively assess students' knowledge (Harris & McCann, 1994). Tests, however, fail in presenting themselves as a friendly way for students to demonstrate what they have learned.; and Brown, 2004).

Formal and Informal Assessment

According to Brown (2004), formal assessment is like tournaments, where competitors openly demonstrate they are the best (or the worst) at what they've prepared for a period of time. Brown also makes it clear that tests are always formal but formal assessments are not exclusively presented in the form of tests. In this sense, Jabbarifar (2009) argued when a teacher observes, with the help of a rubric, oral performance on Monday's "what I did over the weekend" assignment, she is formally assessing students.

According to Brown's definition (2004) informal assessment involves unplanned actions and activities that among other forms include comments and short mini-lessons. The type of results could go from "well done to you need to check the use of phrasal verbs using get + particle" These instances are not done in advanced, or involve on the part of the teacher, preparing any materials. Typically, the information that is obtained from this assessment piece is not used to make a final decision, but instead the teacher uses this info to reinforce the final decisions that will be reflected in the report.

Implicit and Explicit Assessment

Bachman and Palmer (2010) sustain that teachers' role as evidence-of-performance collectors, enter in a series of interactions with the students that are evident and on purpose; others can barely be recognized as actions that seek to test or evaluate. Table 1 presented below summarizes the characteristics and purposes of implicit and explicit assessment.

Table 1. Differences between implicit and explicit assessment

Type of Assessment	Characteristics	Purposes
Explicit	Explicit Clear: Expressed:	Decision made on summative performance Decision made on formative assessment Teachers focuses more on specific areas of content Student spends more time on one specific linguistic area
Implicit	Continuous Instantaneous Cyclical Unexpressed	It is concerned with formative actions The teacher or students may not be aware of it taking place

Source: adapted from Bachman and Palmer (2010)

Departing from this differentiation, assessment can also be referred in terms of being systematically organized and designed to obtain information about how students are learning (Bachman and Palmer, 2010). These pieces of assessment are contained in the syllabus that teachers deliver at the beginning of a semester or program.

Formative and Summative Assessment

Lewy (1990) posited that formative assessment is anything that takes during instruction in an ongoing way, between teachers and students that aims at monitoring learning and teaching in the form of adequate feedback. There are two purposes for formative assessment according to Nitko (1995), in the first place it seeks to modify learning procedures and in the second, fixing problems that take place during instruction that were not detected at the beginning.

Because formative assessment has become more and more popular, teachers are being made aware of its benefits and potentials. Black & Wiliam (1998) referred to it as “a moment of learning” (p.11).

Gattullo (2000) says that apart from providing opportunity for immediate action, it also looks to perfect the teaching learning process and produce better outcomes. From this point of view, it can be said that the majority of the assessment actions that take in the classroom is formative.

Summative assessment, as its name suggests, summarizes what the students have learnt during a course and it is usually done at the end of a period of time, typically a semester (Brown, 2004). It is a way of verifying that the objectives set at the beginning of the program have been reached. Examples of a summative exam are midterms and final exams. Even if the teacher has designed a piece of assessment to accompany learning, this is said to be summative if it lacks feedback and seeks instead allocate a score to students. Alderson (2005) associated summative assessment with long traditional tests which were so stressful to students.

In addition, Zhuang (2010) argued that an autonomous learner may need to set learning goals, language content and pace, a learning process, find a suitable learning methodology and assessing learning achievements.

It is indispensable that students receive feedback to analyze and reflect on the positive and negative comments made by their teachers. When this happens, the use that students make of language is reinforced or corrected, and so more progress is made (Najeeb, 2013, p. 1240). However, even teachers and learners are able to assume the opportunities to practice a language using ICT, they need a time to understand all the cultural educational settings that represent to use authentic material (Padilha, 2013).

Authentic Assessment

Many times, our students fail to show what they know through a given assessment, whether this is formal or informal; summative or formative. This by no means must be taken as final. There may be hidden reason why this student wasn't able to show that she learnt the content. It is also a fact of learners' personality as confidence or values as responsibility (Dang,

2010). One possible reason may be the type of assessment used. Although there may be other explanations, this section will be about the type of assessment and its capacity to reveal students' knowledge.

The idea behind authentic assessment is that students apply the knowledge, skills and values learned in their real life. This requires performance that integrates several skills and knowledge in the solution of a problems or completing a task including their abilities for learning autonomously (Sanprasert, 2010). It focuses on students' analytical skills; ability to integrate what they learn; creativity; ability to work collaboratively; and written and oral expression skills. It values the learning process as much as the finished product (Rojas, Villafuerte and Soto, 2017).

Among the previous studies revised on this Project, it is quoted the work of Lamb (2002) who determined how the attributes: personal investment in learning English, willingness and ability to study the language autonomously can influence on the process of EFL acquisition. Those attributes move people to exploit as much as possible the language practice opportunities they find in their location. He also determined that longitudinal ethnographic studies using a limited number of individual allow to determine the way how these personal qualities interact with features of the environment. Meanwhile, "large-scale quantitative research can be used to distinguish successful and unsuccessful learners in concern to learners' aptitudes, gender, and socioeconomic status" (Lamb, 2002, p.50).

In other hand, Najeeb (2013) insisted about the students' necessity of feedback to stimulate their process of analyze and working on their weak points marked by teachers during the corrective process. He ratifies that students' feedback make of the language process an improvement act. However, it is necessary to promote the construction of comfortable learning environment "where the learners feel encouraged, they are more likely to experiment with different learning strategies and not be afraid to ask questions and to ask for assistance when necessary" (p.1240). In addition, ICT can support

teacher to involve learners' direct, and interactive contact with the target language (Fernandez & Torres, 2015).

In the Ecuadorian context, the formative and summative assessment experience of scholars Farfan, Villafuerte, Romero and Intriago (2017), which consisted in the production of digital videos as English class learning project followed by a self-evaluation, reflection and self-correction activities showed, how it is possible to generate assessment procedures and promote in students a creative and memorable positive experience based on the feedback procedure.

Methodology

The methodology applied in this work is action research. It consists in the design of language practices that mixed Literature Reading Circles and Google Applications to implement a process of extensive reading supported with feedback inputs. The educational goal is to improve the participants English language level.

Sample

The sample is composed of 120 students of the Program of English Language at a Public University in Ecuador. It is a heterogeneous sample with 30% male and 70% female; age range 22-40 years old. The criteria of participation were: to be a student officially registered and to attend to the language practices implemented during the execution of the project.

Ethics norms and procedures

Following the ethics norms internationally applied, every participant signed the letter of consent informed down. They had 7 weeks to change their decision of participation. It is warranty the state of anonymous of every participant's identity. The documentation generated in this research will be kept under confidence status for seven years. The results and data generated in this research will be used only for the effect of educational purposes.

Literature Circles organization

Literature Circles are sessions organized in groups from four to six participants. The participating students are assigned some roles that they will use for both reading and sharing ideas and details from the books. Typically, students meet once a week to present and discuss their selections from the reading done during the week. The types of books that work best with Literature Circles are short novels or tales tell a story, as human beings are known for enjoying content from the stories.

The participants' roles

The literature circles expose learners to multiple roles expecting they gain confidence as they have the sense of achievement.

Shelton-Strong (2012) suggest among the most popular roles, the following:

- Discussion's Leader. - The student creates a list of questions that the other students should discuss about the section of the book assigned. The students use their level of English to create questions that generate interpretations of universal nature. He encourages the other students to keep a balance flow of communication.
- Detective of diction. - He or she carefully revises what type of words are used. They locate phrases and passages that are descriptive, powerful, funny, surprising or confusing. The students explain why they selected those words and why the author decided to use them.
- Bridge builder - This role allows the participant to create meaningful connections between the students, places, events, the community and their own life.
- Reporter: The idea here is to present the essential points of the pages or chapters read. The student makes a brief summary describing the setting, the plot, the characters.

- Artist: the artist creates an illustration that is related to a passage, character, event, etc., that the student finds relevant and meaningful. The student is expected to present and explain what the graphic representation means and encourage other to make comments and ask questions.

List of Books Selected

English levels	Book Title and Author	Publishing Company	Notes
Level 1	The Last Photo by Bernard Smith April in Moscow by Stephen Rabley Carnival by Annette Keen Girl Meets Boy by Derek Strange	Longman	All Literature Circles began with Pilot round that permitted learners to get accustomed to the sequence, and were asked to formulate questions and clarify doubts
Level 2	King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table by Deborah Tempest Moby Dick by Herman Melville The Room in the Tower and Other Ghost Stories by Rudyard Kipling Lost Love and Other Stories by Jan Carew	Longman	
Level 3, 4 and 6	American Crime Stories by John Scott The Picture of Dorian Grey by Oscar Wilde The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne	Longman	

Process of Continuous Feedback

The purpose of the intervention was to continually improve students' level of English from the two types of feedback. The student would first receive input via the graded readers to later on use the contents of the stories to produce new language by interacting in the socialization part of the Literature Circles. With this sample, both teachers and students completed their specific assessments which would give students the opportunity to pay attention to what they needed to improve or correct in the next circles. Students were constantly reminded of the importance of completing the rubrics.

Figure 1. The feedback process through the reading circles

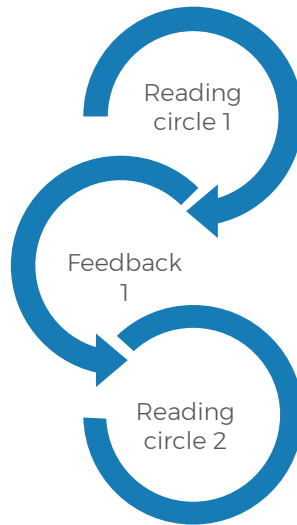


Figure 2. Empty form for students to share the contents of their readings based on some roles assigned.

Online form for peer-reviewing done by the Teacher

The first document to fulfill this purpose was a form that would permit the instructor to make comments on the way students produced language. To do this in a way that was manageable for the teachers, an instrument containing categories of linguistic and communicative performance was created. A spoken interaction performance instrument (see figure 3) was created for the teachers to assess students' linguistic and communicative performance. The document assessed categories that could be observed from the contributions made on the Literature Circle form. The categories used were

- master of vocabulary,
- grammatical accuracy,
- spelling and
- pragmatic knowledge.

Each component of the form establishes a description of differing levels of performance. For example, the component Grammatical Accuracy presents five levels that go from 1 to 5. Number 1 describes performance as “she or he manifests a limited control over a few simple grammatical and syntactic structures from a repertoire of language learned”

Erick Alarcon ☆ ■

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	B	C	D	E	F
	ACCURACY				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical and syntactical structures within a learned repertoire.	It uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically committing basic errors; for example, often confused tenses and forget maintain consistency; however, it tends to be clear what you are trying to say.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of "formulas" and common structures related to the more predictable situations. It communicates with reasonable correction in simple situations; generally has good grammatical control, but with an evident influence of the mother tongue. He makes mistakes, but it is clear what you are trying to express.	Good grammatical control; You can still make occasional "slips" no systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure, but are rare and can often correct in retrospect. Manifests a relatively high degree of grammatical control. No mistakes that produce misunderstandings.	It maintains a high degree of grammatical correctness consistently; errors are rare and hardly noticeable
<p>Comentario: Prefiere tomar su tiempo para bucar las palabras adecuadas, con la gramatica y pronunciacion correcta. Identifica sus errores mientras habla y corrige inmediatamente. Intervenciones acertados: Acording to;my reason for selecting this phrase was; tell someone, say to someone. Poner atencion a: You get impressive. Should be: you get impressed and the story is impressive. How does he look like? VIDEO 6: sugiero corregir lo siguiente: If you have the opportunity to open the box, you open? por Would you open it? ; Ivan, you took the map? por Ivan, Would you take the map?; And you Jhon? por what about you Jhon?; Help to someone por help someone. VIDEO 7: Se sugiere cambiar lo siguiente: The story don't have sense by the story does not make any sense. y Help someone CORRECTO. Help to someone, INCORRECTO. VIDEO 8: ATENCION A: If I were Martin, I try to pay a course of photo, or maybe I rent a apartment very big to put photos. Sugiero lo siguiente: If I were Martin, I would try to pay myself a photography course, or maybe, I would rent a big apartment.</p>					

Source: Class Literature Circles 2016(1)

The table above presented teachers with the opportunity to act responsibly and technically so their judgments were objective, arguable and fair. This led the group of participating teachers to have sessions where many questions were asked. Teachers presented what they would grade a student and presented it for discussion. This exercise left the teachers better prepared (and feeling less guilty) for applying the rubric.

Online Form for Developing Learning Strategies and Self-regulation

Apart from the teacher engaging in processes of reviewing the students' interactions to orient them towards adjustments to improve performance, the learners got involved in a process of analyzing their own interventions. For this, they used a form that moved them to consider what strategies (if any) they used during the sessions and how this improved their participation or could improve a future participation. The form was designed from Rebecca Oxford's (1989) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

This inventory divides them into direct and indirect ones. Memory, cognitive and compensation strategies are in the same group. The ones related to memory help students store and retrieve information. Cognitive ones allow students direct involvement with the material used for learning.

Finally, those dealing with compensation are useful when despite of the limited knowledge the student has, he or she can work a way around in understanding or producing language. Fig. 4 displays the description for each the categories described above.

Figure 4. Form containing the strategies to be used and developed by students

Hugo Cano ☆ ■

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NO	ITEM	1	2	3	4	5	COMMENTARY
Memory strategies							
1	I used new words in phrases or sentences comoejercicio built to remember.			x			
2	I tried to remember a new word by making a mental picture of a situation where I can use that word				x		
3	I used rhymes to remember new words of the readings.			x			
Cognitive strategies							
4	I repeated the new words several times		x				
5	I practiced English sounds		x				
6	I used the words I know in different ways			x			
7	I started conversations in English this week				x		
8	I tried not to translate word for word.				x		
9	I read in English for pleasure this week						
10	I wrote notes, messages on Whatsapp, Messenger, letters or inforemes in English			x		x	
11	Summaries of what I read and hear in English				x		
Compensation Strategies							
12	When I did not know how to say a word in English, the said in Spanish.				x		
13	I tried to guess what the other person will say			x			

Source: Class Literature Circles 2016(1)

The indirect strategies (fig. 5) in turn are divided into meta-cognitive, affective and social. Metacognitive strategies are related to thinking about learning as it takes place via planning and execution, as well as monitoring and evaluating. Affective strategies make students aware of controlling and taking advantage of emotions to deal with communication tasks. And social strategies refer to those deliberate actions done by the students to interact successfully with other people. We think this kind of tools are examples teachers can follow to create assessment procedures less degrading, artificial, anxiety-provoking (Brown, 2004).

Figure 5. Form containing the strategies to be used and developed by students

Hugo Cano ☆

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A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
			Metacognitive strategies						
20			I paid attention to how my classmates spoke English.			x			
21			I'm thinking and asking others how to be a better learner of English				x		
22			I planned my schedule to have enough time to study and perform well				x		
23			I have clear goals to improve my English skills.				x		
24			I know exactly how to improve my knowledge and skills in English		x				
25			I tried reading in English as much as possible			x			
26			I tried to find as many ways as possible to use and practice English.				x		
27			I reflected on my progress in learning English		x				
28			I noticed my mistakes and use that information to help improve.					x	
29			I understand that part of learning English involves making mistakes				x		
			Affective strategies						
30			I tried to relax when I was talking tens @ English.		x				
31			I ventured to speak English even when I was afraid to make mistakes.				x		
32			I reward myself when I did mism @ good.			x			
33			I noticed when I started studying @ nerves or use English.				x		
34			I wrote down my feelings about learning English in a journal.					x	
35			I talked to someone about how I feel to learn English.					x	
			Social strategies						
36			I asked others to correct me when I speak				x		
37			I have practiced English with others				x		
38			I have asked questions in English				x		
39			I have been learning about the culture of English				x		
40			When I did not understand something, I asked to speak more slowly or to repeat.				x		

Source: Class Literature Circles 2016(1)

Findings and Discussion

Effective classroom assessment and evaluation requires an understanding of the role of evaluation in planning and delivering instruction. It calls for the collection and interpretation of a wide range of information, familiarity with a variety of different methods of assessment and for competence in using these methods creatively, careful and systematic record keeping and judgment. Also, an effective classroom assessment and evaluation calls on teachers to become agents of change in their classrooms actively using the results of assessment to modify and improve the learning environments they create.

One of the main challenges that language teachers face is making students aware that a language is not a piece of knowledge or a set of skills whose mastery depends primarily on the teacher, the textbook, the method or any other external factor. This applies even more so when it comes to assessing the gains made from being in contact with a learning activity. First, we had hypothesized that if we include our students in the reviewing of their oral performances, we could start in them a process of reflexivity and becoming aware of the advantages that exist in observing how one speaks. Second, thinking about what strategies they used or could have used becomes a crucial thinking routine in students' coping with challenging communicative situations that they might face.

Teachers gain valuable insight and feedback that can be used to make adjustments, continue practices or change ones that don't work. This dynamic process may also yield information that produces the setting of new learning goals, re-stating weak ones, and eliminating impractical or meaningless ones.

It can be said that informal assessment takes place during the whole instructional process because it is a quick way of checking not only whether students are paying attention, but also whether you are being effective with the way you have designed the lessons. Looked at from this perspective,

and in consonance with Brown's definition, informal assessment is concerned more with giving feedback rather than making a decision. One safer and fairer route that can be taken by teachers is to combine these beforehand organized assessments with ones that are less formal and involve the aid of the students themselves. In this way, our promoting or failing a student will be based on a more fair and reliable decision.

In our experience as instructors, generating and receiving feedback is an academic practice that helps learners to improve the quality of a product. To reach its maximum benefits, it is required that the readers assume the role of motivating and guide leaders whom accompany permanently to learners in their process of dialogue construction. Also, it is necessary lecturers promote in learners the capabilities to assume an "open mind" or "receptive" position before their texts observations and viewers' critics.

Conclusions

It is concluded that the combination of Literature Circles and Google Apps has the flexibility required to support learners to improve their language skills in their foreign language acquisition process. Receiving feedback either from self or more knowledgeable others has been globally applied for a long time; and it is still an efficient technique that allows to improve the way people use the language. It is a practice that should be promoted and led by teachers, especially in the university setting as learners prepare to interact in a world that requires of collaborative work and a sincere act of self-evaluation and reflexivity.

The revision of oral production demands of challenges such as experience, style, effective communication, and knowledge about specific topics, etc. This work constitutes an initial step in sampling more complex processes of assessment for learning in a university context. In this case, the benefit has been twofold because apart from bringing the review

experience to the students, they benefited from having the chance to be assessed and to assess themselves while learning English. The main advantage that Google Docs in combination with Literature Circles has, lies on their allowing shareability and collaboration. Participants shared with the teachers so that they could engage in the assessment process to improve their use of English overall.

Acknowledgment: To the students that participated in this process Flora Zibas, Hugo Cano, Tito Soliz, Katherine Chavez, Stefy Solorzano, Ivan García, Erick Alarcón, Fernando Dender y Lilibeth Mero

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Edición digital 2017-2018.
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ISBN: 978-9942-24-111-5

