Assessment

Basic Concepts, Thoughtful Decisions

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KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT
	Institutions from basic to higher education in Mexico that offer courses of English as a Foreign Language rely heavily on the administering of assessment, usually a formal type of assessment. However, the literature shows how important it is the involvement of other types of assessment in the classroom for effective language learning to take place. For instance, assessment for learning, which consist of a continuous assessment where learners receive feedback so greater learning occurs, what is more, it enables teachers to modify their teaching ways as they reflect on the learners' progress. To show how assessment is carried out in our context, this research project focuses on a case study within the CAADI from FOD in the UANL.

GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE ACADEMICS

1. Understanding assessment

1.1. Difference between assessment and evaluation

Assessment and evaluation, especially in the ELT field, are often used indistinctively, and aiming the same purpose: the obtaining of grades that show what students have learned. In this sense, it is imperative to mention that even though assessment and evaluation can serve that purpose through the implementation of tests and examinations, assessment should be more directed to providing feedback to learners so that they know what they are capable of doing, linguistically speaking, and to know how to achieve better competencies in the English language. Therefore, the concepts of assessment and evaluation must be well defined so that they can be differentiated.

The evaluation seeks a number, grade or level, being the final result of a process. Parker, P., Fleming, P., Beyerlein, S., Apple, D. and Krumsieg, K. (2001, p.01) point out that evaluation "is a judgment or determination of the quality of a performance, product, or use of a process against a standard." There are a number of objectives for evaluation to take place, for instance, to determine the language level of a student, to observe what students have achieved at the end of the course in terms of content, to see how well learners can manage one of more language skills, among others.

On the contrary, assessment serves another purpose; it requires some type of accompanying or guidance through a process, in this case, the language learning process. It is the task of the teacher to let the learners know where they stand, how much they are progressing as well as how to reach the desirable language objective, and assessing students properly can help to do so.

Cameron, L. (2001, p.214) ascertains this idea when stating: "assessments can motivate learners, help teachers plan more effective lessons, inform the improvement of instructional programs, and support further learning with feedback" (Cited in Yoneda, 2012, p.42). This shows that assessment delivers a win-win situation, where instructors, learners and institutions obtain the desirable objectives. Cameron (2001) also notes that assessment must be a collaborative act between teacher and student, and that it must support the aims of the lesson (p.42). Such statement displays a relationship where the teacher guides the learners by providing positive but real feedback to learners, and using the assessment to modify his teaching ways to obtain better language skills on learners. In other words, assessment is a dynamic system where teacher, students and the lesson plan are involved. Teachers should make clear for learners not only what aspects of the language to improve, but also how they are doing in the process.

Indisputably, evaluation and assessment are two different processes with dissimilar purposes. However, both aim to improve learners' language skills. Moreover, these learning tools should not be seen as conflicting, but instead, as balancing resources that will support principally learners, as well as instructors and therefore, institutions. The following chart provided by Parker et. al (2001, p. 2) clearly illustrates and summarizes the differences between these two concepts (assessment and evaluation):

Table 1: Differences between assessment and evaluation

	Assessment	Evaluation
Purpose	To improve future performance	To judge the merit or worth of a performance against a predefined standard
Setting Criteria	Both the assessee and the assessor choose the criteria.	The evaluator determines the criteria
Control	The assessee - who can choose to make use of assessment feedback	The evaluator - who is able to make a judgment which impacts the evaluatee
Depth of analysis	Thorough analysis by answering questions such as why and how to improve future performance	Calibration against a standard
Response	Positive outlook of implementing and action plan	Closure with failure or success

Source: Parker et al. (2001, p. 2).

1.2. Types of assessment

Over the years experts in the field of education have broken paradigms on how and why to assess learning and learners by developing, proposing and implementing a variety of ways in the area of assessment with the solely purpose of assisting both, teachers and learners to attain language learning objectives. These types of assessment have evolved over time from the teachers and researchers' reflection on the necessity of achieving greater learning in their own contexts, which happens to be similar to others, consequently, these are likely to be adapted to circumstances where situations are alike. Having a wide range of types of assessment can make it easier for teachers to put into practice such an essential procedure, resulting in a beneficial teaching-learning process. The two types of assessment that will be developed along this theoretical framework are: assessment for learning (formative assessment) and assessment of learning (summative assessment).

1.2.1 Assessment for learning

When speaking of assessment for learning, it means that the focus of this is in the process, and sometimes it is referred to as formative assessment. That being said, let us recall that a feature of assessment is delivering feedback to learners. In the same line of thought, Jones (2005, p.1) remarks that "the principal characteristic of assessment for learning is effective feedback provided by teachers to learners on their progress. The value of feedback is dependent on two factors: the quality of feedback, and how learners receive and ultimately use it." Hence, to be capable of offering adequate feedback, teachers need to be trained since most teachers are unaware of such practice. Moreover, learners need to know what to do with it –feedback-, once again, teachers must be trained to train students so they are capable of managing the information provided to reach their desirable level of English, in this case.

Assessment for learning is about conducting pertinent action while the teaching-learning process is occurring, not only until the end of the course. Noyce and Hickey (2011) mention the importance of assessing learners this way, stating that this is done "...in order to give useful feedback and make timely changes in instruction to ensure maximal student growth." (Cited in Alvarez, L., Ananda, S., Walqui, A., Sato, E., & Rabinowitz, S., 2014, p.03). Implementing this type of assessment will aid instructors to identify possible difficulties learners are facing, and consequently modify their ways of teaching in time to achieve greater benefits for language learning.

1.2.2. Principles of assessment for learning

Carrying out assessment for learning as well as any other type of assessment might be a challenge for instructors, especially when they are not aware of the procedures to follow to enhance their teaching practices within the terms of such assessment. To cope with this problematic Alvarez et al. (2014, p. 3-4) suggest six principles for effective assessment –for learning-, and they will be described next:

1. Promotes student learning: It must be clear that this type of assessment fosters the assessing of students learning on a continuous basis, and by doing so learners are able to actually appreciate their results and whether they have attained the short-term objectives, being involved in the process.
2. Elicits evidence of learning through a variety of tasks: Assessment for learning can be executed in different manners for the teacher to gather information about students learning and students learning progress. Shavelson (2008) establishes that such tasks can be planned or opportunistic, and he proposes that tasks can be:

Table 2. Types of Tasks Instructors Can Implement under Assessment for Learning

Type of task	Description	Example
On-the-fly	Formative assessment occurs in response to an unexpected "teachable moment"	To address a misconception evidenced by a student comment, a teacher might pose an impromptu question to identify the source of the misunderstanding.
Planned-for interaction is purposeful	A teacher designs ways to identify the gap between what students actually know and what they should know.	A teacher might pose prepared-in-advance tasks to students which are tied to the learning goals.
Curriculum-embedded	Formative assessments are inserted at specific points in a unit	A teacher might engage students in the solution of a novel problem that weaves student understanding of concepts introduced in that unit before deciding whether to proceed to the next unit

Compilation based on information cited in Alvarez et al., 2014, p.3

Analyzing the content of the previous table provides a general insight of great support for teachers to know when to assess, having in mind that such assessing is to be done through the teaching-learning process. From the different tasks teachers will obtain different outcomes that can be used as evidence of the learning process and/or as information to make adjustments to the teaching practice.

3. Changes the roles of teacher and students: Unlike any other ways of teaching and assessing, assessment for learning is student-centered. Teacher acts as the guide, and will clearly state the purpose of the class, the outcome of it, as well as providing effective feedback. As for the learners, according to Shavelson (2008) "not only perform tasks that provide evidence for their current learning, but they are involved in self-assessment." (Cited in Alvarez et al.: 2008, p.4). It has been stated before how much students are in need to be trained so they can be part of this assessment model and be able drive their learning experience based on teachers' feedback and his own reflection once having an outcome and the feedback provided by the instructor.
4. Uses learning progressions to anchor learning goals and monitor learning: As students reach short-term objectives and teachers observe such progressions, new objectives are set and teachers can plan according to the learners´ needs to become proficient in the aspects of the new language aimed within the objectives. By monitoring students learning and being aware of the their progression and needs,

teachers can implement instruction strategies to support learners on the expected language learning.

5. Results in meaningful feedback and adjustments to improve instruction for students: One of the main features of assessment for learning is feedback, which must be clear enough for students to know where they are and where they need to be, providing the necessary tools to help them cope with such situation timely. Moreover, within this principle, Heritage (2013) depicts the importance of the teachers´ intervention to help students develop greater languages skills "Learning opportunities for students are created based on an assessment of what students have learned and what they have misinterpreted." (Cited in Alvarez et al., 2014, p. 4). This is, instructors take into account both what they observe what students have learned as well as the flaws they perceive throughout the language sessions.

6. Enables students to become self-regulated and autonomous learners: Undoubtedly assessment for learning implies a variety of perquisites to those involved in the teaching-learning process. One of these advantages is that during the assessing procedure students gain enough confidence and knowledge to become autonomous learners.

This type of assessment offers efficient language learning experience if conducted properly, taking into account the principles and adequate strategies to carry it out within English language classrooms. On the one hand, teachers must set the goals, define the tasks for students, give clear feedback to learners and be able to adjust their teaching practice along the course. On the other hand, students will be capable of developing metacognitive skills that will allow them to monitor their language learning progress and develop their own ways to acquire more of it.

1.2.2. Assessment of learning

Unlike the prior type of assessment, summative assessment usually comes at the end of the course, and it operates as a tool for the teacher to determine a grade based on students' results but also to analyze how much students have learned until that moment. Moreover, Ezir (2013, p. 41) claims that summative assessment "is used to communicate students' abilities to external stakeholders." This indicates that learners' achievements are useful to further persons other than the teachers and students, in order to improve the overall teaching and learning practice. Stakeholders are, according to Gall, Gall and Borg (2005, p. 453) "individuals who are involved in the phenomenon that is being evaluated or who may be affected by or interested in the findings of an evaluation." These can range from students themselves, those involved in the making of the curricula of the program to the people connected with the education policies matters and employers. The information obtained from the students' summative assessment delivers significant information to the stakeholders for their own purposes;

and for the language classroom those scores are useful to realize "students' progress with regard to a course and/or standard" (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 2009), hence, it may be inferred that summative assessment is a type of standardize assessment since in the end, it measures language learners' skills against an established content criterion.

Due to this, some researchers such as Garrison and Ehringhaus (n.d., p. 01) affirm that "it can only help in evaluating certain aspects of the learning process" data extracted from this type of assessment can give a valuable insight of the efficacy of the program and its content, although it may not show the actual students' learning nor their abilities to manage the language adequately.

In our context prevails the summative assessment as the most dominant way to assess students through quizzes or exams (mid-term and final) and without much more implication of teachers in the teaching duties. Instructors are driven by the institutions to focus and look for high numbers or grades, or at least to have students passing with the minimum required. As a consequence, there are a vast amount of cases where learners are in classes that do not correspond to the language level they actually have attained; and this might be the result of employing summative assessment as the only way to assess students.

1.3. Techniques for assessing

To accomplish competently any type of assessment instructors can make use of different techniques that will help them obtain the data that is required for their own purposes. There are plenty of resources educators and researchers have developed to support teachers to attain the outcomes they are pursuing; teachers should select the ones that are appropriate not only with his teaching ways but more importantly, according to the type of assessment(s) they are to put into practice in the language classroom, having always as target an efficient language learning experience. The Waterloo Region School District School Board (2013, p.13) even suggests that "Teachers may develop with students the criteria they will use to assess learning, helping students understand the evidence of learning required to demonstrate knowledge and skills. " This can be carried out as long as it fulfills the language necessities students need to cover and master, and if the type of assessment allows it. This theoretical framework will only focus on certain techniques of assessment: observation and tests.

1.3.1. Observation

Observation is an assessment technique that has been in use in the classrooms. Although it may seem simple, observation requires beforehand preparation since this technique follows a series of steps to follow through which should be anticipated to assess students well and compile the required outcomes

from it. Maxwell (2001, p. 01) asserts that "teacher observation is capable of providing substantial information on student demonstration of learning outcomes at all levels of education." If this technique is implemented correctly it can provide objective and valuable information about students learning status. There are two possible scenarios in which observation may arise suggested by Maxwell (2001).

The previous chart illustrates how observation can be planned (planned observation), where teachers ahead of time on the kind of activities that could provide outcomes teachers will expect from students, and based on the observation of those, assess them. Furthermore, the chart provides information about how observation can be unplanned as well (incidental observation); the classroom interaction will certainly present situations where teachers can take advantage of, in order to assess students and generate some sort of language reflection and/or knowledge of it. It is important to point out that there are different aspects that teachers may be observing to assess learners, Maxwell (2001, p.04) mentions that some of these aspects can be events, performances, activities, or artifacts. That is to say, observations may be aimed at the process, at the product of such process or both, as Maxwell (2001, p. 05) describes "An artefact is something constructed by the student, for example, a worksheet, a piece of writing, a painting, a composition,— in other words, a product of an activity that shows evidence of the work done in it. Teacher observation is not primarily concerned with the artefact itself but with the way in which the artefact was produced" It should be noted that although the author mentions the artefact or product is not the main point of observation, it could also be used.

Table 3. Types of Observation

Type of Observation	Characteristics
Incidental observation	Occurs during the ongoing (deliberate) activities of teaching and learning and the interactions between teacher and students. In other words, an unplanned opportunity emerges, in the context of classroom activities, where the teacher observes some aspect of individual student learning. Whether incidental observation can be used as a basis for formal assessment and reporting may depend on the records that are kept.
Planned observation	Involves deliberate planning of an opportunity for the teacher to observe specific learning outcomes. This planned opportunity may occur in the context of regular classroom activities or may occur through the setting of an assessment task (such as a practical or performance activity)

Source: Compilation based on information by Maxwell (2001)

Depending on the type of observations that will be carried out, as well as what is to be observed, teachers can utilize different evidences that will support them to assess students based on the information obtained.

When teachers focus on observing the processes they will be able to gather data (evidence) to assess learners through a variety of means. Maxwell (2002, p.8) lists two main ways of collecting such evidence: the direct record and the written record. As for the direct record, teachers can collect the evidence using 'traces', which refer to visual recordings as audios, videos and photographs; these tools are of great help for teachers to observe details they might have not perceived during the actual class. And the written records, that are gathered using observation sheets where descriptions in the form of comments about students' performance are made and the use of checklists or rubrics, additionally teachers can create logbooks where they record in written form incidents occurred in the classroom; to avoid bias instructors should write them immediately so they print significant and valuable details.

On a daily basis teachers do observe their classrooms situations and students, but if they become more methodical and reflective in their ways of observing, they will be able to assess students in such way that it will have a major and positive impact in the students' language learning. Nowadays there are plenty of technological tools that can easily support teachers to carry out this observation technique.

2. Background of assessment in Mexico

For Ramirez (2013) in *Diez años de investigación en enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras,* out of all research work done in Mexico from 2000 to 2011, only 4% corresponds to the subject of assessment. Furthermore, a first approach to recent articles in some of the foremost international magazines on applied linguistics and ELT revealed evidence that such matter (assessment) has not been broadly studied. In the magazines *Applied Linguistics*, *Foreign Language Annals*, *The modern Language Journal*, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *ELT Journal*, *Recall* and *Language Teaching* it can be seen how authors share their insights on traditional topics, and others which can be catalogued as novelty, but then again, the subject of assessment is not noticeable. And throughout a revision of the indexes of such magazines edited in 2014 and 2015, three articles associated with assessment could be found, though none of them directly related to the established proposal.

According to the *English Proficiency Index* from *EF Education First* (Forbes Mexico, 2013) in the last six years the level of English in Mexico dropped from moderated to low. The described situation presents a problematical outlook for the country as it limits its current capability as well as its future economic

development. Economic and cultural globalization requires more competitive human resources – internationally speaking.

The report *Sorry. El Aprendizaje de inglés en México* (2015) reads that we have an English failing system, in which diplomas, grades, and certifications are given and yet there is no guarantee of real learning; this is the reason why it is imperative to find solutions for such unfortunate situation. Moreover, this report assures that it is vital for English teachers to have the necessary tools to implement successful methodologies for better teaching ways.

A probable deficiency lays on how teachers are trained in terms of assessment, and in the malpractice of teachers when assessing inside a classroom. Lopez (2010) declares that the lack of training or formation hinders "assessments to be used in a constructive manner so it facilitates the teaching and learning process."

2.1. Context

The Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL) is an institution of higher education situated in San Nicolás in the state of Nuevo León, Mexico. It is one of the most important universities in Mexico, especially in the northern part of the country. The UANL offers studies at high school level, as well as undergraduate, Master and Doctoral programs that benefit the academic growth of the individuals from the region and others who attend this university from other states and countries.

2.1.2. Self-Learning Language Centers

To contribute with the professional and academic development of students and other individuals, and being aware of the importance languages have nowadays, especially English, the UANL offers English courses in its Self-Learning Language Centers (CAADI in its Spanish acronym). The objective is to "encourage foreign language learning through its Language Centers and Self-Learning Language Centers (CAADI) which support learners to reach language competence" (UANL, 2008). Any person who is willing to learn English or any other language available in the CAADI can enroll in it, students from the university or non-students.

CAADIs are established in the different schools that belong to the UANL and throughout the different campuses, for example in the School of Medicine, School of Psychology, School of Philosophy, School of Engineering, and so on. Each one of these CAADIs vary their target, some of these, for instance, accept only teenagers and adults, others allow from small children to adolescents, students from their own schools.

The current research project is being carried out in the CAADI from the School of Sports Organization (FOD for its Spanish acronym). This center has English courses on Saturdays, and it is aimed to infants, children and teenagers; its main objective is for students to be communicatively competent in the English language. This CAADI offers eight different levels: Introductory 1, Introductory 2, Basic 1, Basic 2, Basic 3, Intermediate, High, and Advanced level. As a complement and at the end of the last level, students have the option of joining a conversation course to put into practice their oral and communication skills.

The function and mission of the CAADI from FOD, according to their web page (UANL, 2016) are:

Function: The CAADI is in charge of teaching English with a communicative approach in which learners develop their language abilities for the oral and written communication.

Mission: Provide quality second language (English) courses, supporting the education of the students in terms of their linguistic competence, utilizing technological tools.

Although the CAADI from FOD claims to teach English as a second language, let us remember that in Mexico and consequently in Monterrey, English is learned as a foreign language since English is not spoken in the context as a first or main language.

The eight levels taught specifically in this CAADI range from true beginners to B2 level. Students attend every Saturday morning, for three hours, and over a period of five months. Teachers are not asked to use certain methodology as long as they comply with the developing of the learners' communicative competences that they are supposed to achieve.

Furthermore, students are assessed mainly by exams, in the case of the High level, eight exams (one per unit) throughout the five months, in addition to the mid-term exam and the final one. Participation and homework are taken into consideration for the students' final marks, although the impact is not significant compared to the emphasis and priority given to the quizzes and exams. Teachers are asked to design exams (assessment of learning) that cover the reading, writing and listening skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. Only in the mid-term and final exam, oral exams are added. At the end of the course, the average of each student will be obtained mostly from those exams, since these represent eighty percent of their entire grade, in addition to twenty percent assigned to homework and participation in class. The minimum required to pass to the next level is 75.

3. Methodology

It is vital for any type of research to follow certain scientific procedures to have trustworthy results that show the reality of the studied situation, and therefore, to make it valid. Scholars or researchers can select different research approaches; the two and most common lines are the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach, what is more, both methodological approaches are generally

present and used in a vast amount of research, although one of them tends to have more weight depending on the objective that has to be reached.

3.1. Qualitative Research

Within the XIX century the anthropology thought convenient to employ observation as a privileged way of conducting research, interpret discourses and practices as well as ways of living of population of different cultures, which happened to be very dissimilar to the modern societies.

That being the case, qualitative research is a different approach that lets scholars have an in-depth insight of the participants thoughts that will reveal the results of the research, making it a more humanistic approach, and consequently, preferred by an important and privileged sector: the social sciences researchers. Creswell (2014) states that this type of research

> …is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. (p.32)

Evidently, this type of approach seeks to answer the questions or hypothesis of the study by analyzing the people involved in it and reflect on their context and the data gathered with certain tools that refer to the individuals' behavior, thoughts, discourse, among other features. Qualitative research can seem subjective but supporting evidence with an adequate theoretical framework bias can be avoided, and it should be noted that such method not less valid than quantitative research.

3.1. Action-Research

Inside the prior general classification of methods for conducting research, there are others of particular features that allow to develop in-depth research to reach very specific objectives, for instance, there is the comprehensive method, hermeneutic method, dialectical materialism, discourse analysis, action-research, among others. Traditionally, it is known-within the social sciences- that researchers should not intervene in the reality and environment that is being studied, the task of the researcher is to explain such reality so that s/he or other scholars take the obtained information and knowledge so they are able to change or modify the observed reality. However, social science research requires somehow a way of carrying out certain experimentation or testing on small groups, to verify how a variable has an influence on others. Furthermore, it is of vital im-

portance the ethical commitment researchers should have towards the studied communities where they seek to solve the social problem(s) detected.

When addressing the educational or school context rather than the social one, the action-research method allows researchers and teachers to carry out research in a specific context and try to solve problems of it: the classroom. For the case of this concrete research project, the action-research method, which is part of the qualitative approach, is relevant since it meets the characteristics to solve the problematic sought.

Action-research is vital because "it allows withdrawing conclusions about the educational reality, contributing in a direct or indirect way to the improvement of the teaching quality". (Blández, 1996, p.21) Such method allows teachers to understand their very own classroom, identifying what is to be changed in order to better their teaching, influencing practices that will lead learners to more efficient learning. Moreover, the research results can help other teachers in similar conditions by providing a reference of the context and issues studied in conjunction with proposals that may work to a certain extents in those similar contexts. This way, in words of Blández, action-research "reinforces professional motivation…and reinforces in its participants the interest to better their teaching practice." (1996, p. 25)

Action-research is then, a scientific and dynamic procedure that intervenes directly in specific educational contexts where teaching/learning issues can be observed and analyzed to take the pertinent action to enhance better teaching practices, thus improving learning in the classroom. Such procedure can and should be done a number of occasions until attaining the expected results; therefore, action-research can be seen as a "spiral" procedure. Rose et al. (2015) schematize such procedure in the following manner:

Figure 1: Action-research process
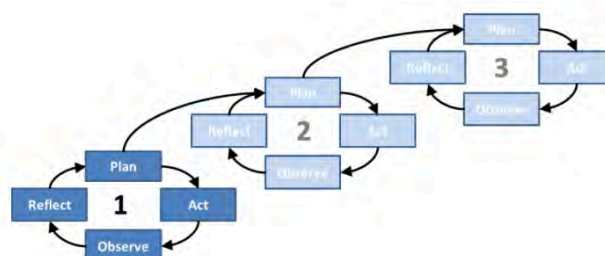
Source: Rose et al. (2015).

The process, as it was mentioned before, requires plenty of observation of the problematic in the classroom, and then one can reflect on what has been observed in order to plan the necessary strategies to act accordingly. This cycle can be repeated several times to finally cope with the targeted issue and achieve the

desired outcomes. Hence, action-research "creates a reflexive faculty" (Blández, 1996, p.26).

To understand better how action-research is conducted and its implications, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) list, in a simplified and clear manner, what is involved:

- Develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening,
- act to implement the plan,
- observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs, and
- reflect on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of stages. (p.10)

For the current research project action-research has been selected since the phenomenon to be studied occurs in the English language classroom, and in words of Burns "action-research is contextual, small-scale and localized –it identifies and investigates problems within a specific situation…it is evaluative as it aims to bring about change and improvement in practice"(1999, p.30). The event to be observed has to do with how assessment is implemented and whether it has an impact on the teaching strategies, and in a later stage of the research project, generate practices that may lead to better teaching practices in terms of assessment.

Action-research in its early stage required reflection on the ongoing phenomenon in the classroom, and later two techniques for gathering data were used: interviews and participant observation, as it has been stated before, this has occurred in the first stages, a subsequent phase, and based on the previous information, is to elaborate a plan of action to intervene in the solving of the targeted issue.

3.2. Interview

An interview "is a conversation kept between two or more people, one who is the interviewer who attempts to gather information through more or less structured questions from the other person." (Blández, 1996, p.77) If the interview is totally structured the interviewer conducts the process based on a pre-defined questionnaire with no possibilities of incorporating and asking other questions to the interviewee; on the contrary, when an interview is not structured, the interviewer has the option of freely formulating more questions that will lead him to the desired objective. And when the interview is neither structured nor free, it is said to be semi structured, in which case the researcher is supported by a interview guide that supports the researcher in managing and regulating the process. The pre-defined questions can change in terms of order, other questions can be added, and even some questions can be skipped or avoided depending on the answers provided by the interviewee.

The latter type Fretchling et al. called it "indepth interview" where there is a set of established questions but the interviewer is free to inquire more if necessary. Fretchling et al. (2010) assert that in this type of interview "the interviewers seek to encourage free and open responses, and there may be a tradeoff between comprehensive coverage of topics and indepth exploration of a more limited set of questions" (p.51)

For this ongoing research project, three are the main characters that are susceptible to be interviewed since they are involved in the context where the phenomenon is taking place and are able to intervene somehow: the English teachers from FOD, the students taking the Saturday English course and the coordinators of the CAADI from FOD. Nevertheless, since the objective is to obtain information regarding the teachers' assessment practice in the language classroom, the way they manage assessment, how they deal with it and so on, the interview is aimed to the English teachers, and the type of interview applied was semi structured.

3.2.1. Analysis and interpretation of the information

The interviews to teachers were recorded to gather the necessary data. Afterwards, such interviews were transcribed and the different answers and statements were categorized in order to analyze and interpret their statements to finally have objective and concrete information that led to the following conclusions.

3.2.1.1. Language teachers are not prepared to assess

The vast majority of the interviewed teachers mentioned that they are not trained to carry out assessment in the classroom, and few of them indicated they know in a very general manner what assessment is because they have partaken in courses during their college years or have taken a special course about it, although it is clear that they tend to misunderstand the term or use the term evaluation and assessment interchangeably. For instance, when one of the teachers was asked whether she had taken any assessment course, she responded: "Only they told us the "assessments". The told us the different ways to assess students, not only exams, but using other activities, but I don't remember the exact activities."

The answer of those who admitted taken a similar course or workshop about assessment does not differ much from the one stated in previous lines, they do recall having taken a course, however they seem not to remember exactly what it was about or how to work assessment in their classroom. The way in which most of these teachers assess learners is through assessment of learning (AOF), in other words, through some type of standardized tests so

they learners obtain certain grade. It is probable that the way they assess learners derives from experience –previous experience and experience acquired along their teaching practice-, or based on a vague academic thought on assessment practice.

In spite of that, some of the teachers recognize the importance of other ways of assessment within their teaching practice. For example, teacher number 3 (T3) was asked: Have you ever taken any courses or workshops about assessment?, she replied: "Not besides the ones I took in the BA, but I'd like to take one, I think is important to have constant preparation, because at the end of the day you need to step up".

3.2.1.2. Heterogeneity in the teachers' assessment practice

All teachers belong to the same institution and the ones interviewed work with teenagers, one may think they all assess their learners the same way. Such statement is true at certain extent, they all have quizzes or exams for their learners although the frequency might differ from one to the other. Moreover, they mentioned different percentages for the different features they take into account for grading learners (tests, homework, participation, and so on) even though such percentages are specified by the head of the language office. On the other hand items such as participation are a tad ambiguous, consequently teachers tend to assess this aspect differently. Some talk about projects, others about speaking skills, presentations and even disposition to learn:

T3 mentions: "I have this evaluation but I have to go beyond that sometimes because summative evaluation is not important, it is but you have to change the things, you have to evaluate other aspects of your students and you need to get to know them better, you need to know really if they are learning what you are teaching. It could be willingness to learn...someone who you see has the drive, a lot of energy, he doesnt know anything but he wants to know, so that's one aspect that I try to take into consideration when I'm evaluating some things...some people are not good with languages, they are not good but they are trying, so that effort I take into consideration."

On the other hand T2 points out: "when they do Power Point Presentations (PPP), when they have to present a specific topic in front of the class, they have to explain it, and they give their ideas, more examples about the topic and I observe how they speak, the grammar rules they are following and of course the visual aids".

Additionally T5 explains:what she considers: "Homework, presentations, homework is readings and writings, presentation on cardboards, PPP, I want that they speak in class".

It is somewhat surprinsing the ambiguity of the term "participation" and what aspects teachers consi-

der to assess it as it can be analyzed from the three different previous statements. Yet, this heterogeneity may be something positive since it enriches the assessment practice, going from assessment of learning to assessment for learning, trying to be flexible and adjust their strategies according to their students and their students' needs, and motivate students in different manners to improve their language skills.

3.2.1.3. The institution and the exams

There is something that stands out in the assessment practice in FOD, this is the evident and considerable importance tests and exam have to obtain students' learning information to assign a grade with the purpose of passing or making the learner repeat the level s/he is studying. When teachers are asked about how they know their students are learnig, some of them refert to tests as a way of having this information. Aftwerwards they are asked what the weigh of those exams is to obtain a grade, from the observation and answers of the teachers it can be said that such tests and exams are the main type and source of assessment practice. Some of their comments on this topic are:

T4: "they need to pass the exams with 75, they need participation, homework, in my case as I ask for portfolios...40% for exams, 30% is for final exams, 20% for written exams, homework and participation 10%".

T5: "Tests is 65%, and participation and homework 15% and the rest is for the way that they talk".

T3: Obviously we have exams, we have a lot of exams, we have the unit exam, depends on the teacher. In my case we have exams for each unit, we also have the middle term exam from unit one to four, and then six to eight in the final exam...Tests 40%, then 10% for homework and participation, the middle term and the final exam about 25%".

It is clear to see how AOL through tests and exams is vital in FOD, some teachers seem not to agree with this, such as T4 when she states: "It is something that the school asks us to do, it is not because I want to. I think the education in Mexico is the same, we have learned in that way, with exams, passing or not etc." She relates such practice with not only an institutional requirement from FOD, but also as part of the whole educational system in our country. Moreover, some teachers feel limited at some extent becuase of the regulations of such institution, T2 reflects: "Maybe my own ideas or my opinions are not included there (in assessment), because I have to follow the evaluation that they (institution) say. So I cannot create anything. I have to follow that and that's it".

3.2.1.4. Un-Awareness on assessment.

Although it seems as though teachers are familiar with terms referring to assessment they are not certain what they consist of or how to carry them

out. Teachers refer more to activities to evaluate students than assessment. Only one of the teachers distinguished –during the interview- between formative and summative assessment (AFL/AOL):

T3: "Summative is when you have to have the sum of everything and you put it in a number, and formative goes beyond that at some point".

Even though she is able to recognize these two different types of assessment she could not specify how to differentiate one from the other or what they exactly consist of, showing uncertainty about the topic, specifically about formative assessment, however, she is aware of the importance on doing things differently in terms of assessment, that not only exams or numbers are crucial, this can be observe when she showed a deeper understanding of assessment when she indicates that:

T3: "I have this evaluation but I have to go beyond that sometimes because summative evaluation is not important, it is but you have to change the things, you have to evaluate other aspects of your students and you need to get to know them better, you need to know really if they are learning what you are teaching".

3.2.1.5. Assessment for Learning (AFL)

It is clear that despite the fact that teachers are unaware of the concept of AFL, they do recognize the relevance of having some sort of observation on the students' learning and then adjuts their teaching practice according to those observations or results. In other words, AFL is present in the classroom, even though it is not recognize as such and it is not done systematically as it should be done.

As for the activities which teachers mentioned they used to assess learners one way or another, there were: exams, activities from the book, speaking activities such as presentations of different topics, writing activities as short compositions, among others. Speaking activities seem to be widely used by most of these teachers, on the one hand they cannot seem to understand AFL, yet with these type of activities used in the way they claim they do it, it can be said that that they carry out AOL to a certain extent:

T1: "I always try to do activities where they can speak and talk, not only to write something or to make written exercises. I like having speaking activities where they can demonstrate me that they are learning".

T2: "when they do PPP, when they have to present a specific topic in front of the class, they have to explain it, and they give their ideas, more examples about the topic and I observe how they speak, the grammar rules they are following...if i realize they are having several problems when speaking or pronunciating I have to focus on that, talk to them and practice what is necessary. That's how I think is good to improve their abilities."

T3: "we have projects, they need to apply what they are learning. At the end of each unit of the book there are projects, so I give them a mini project to work on, and they have to explain what they did to the rest (of the class). I try to make projects to see if they are learning what I'm teaching at that very moment...Every time they present I see the results if they are good, then yes they are in a good path but if they are not good I have to change something in the way I teach, perhaps the activities, maybe apply more speaking or grammar activities. I take that into consideration because is a reflection of my work most of the time because I'm teaching them".

3.2.1.6. Assessment of Learning (AOL)

As it was expected, teachers rely on the usual misconception of assessment only as a way of evaluating students through test -most likely- but also reviewing other products. In other words, they tend to evaluate students' applying tests mostly which will indicate the students' grade and level. Some of them do it for conviction, something that can be observed in their answers, and others only becuase the system requires them to do so:

T1: "The exam, in the reality the exams...I think the exams are the most important, I mean, not for me, but for the school".

T3: "Well, one we have the exams because you need to apply them, that's necessary because I need to give a report of what I'm doing."

T4: "According with the school we must have exams. In my level we have four exams one mid term and one final exam. In these exams and in my case I evaluate grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking because I have oral exams every exam and written skills."

T5: "They (tests) are necessary, it is also a way to see how much they learn in class about writing and it also can help them to speak".

In any case, let us remember that tests are part of most- if not all- institutions, therefore teachers should make the most of them, this is, not only use them to obtain mere results, but also to interpret them and to support learners towards a better English learning experience.

Conclusion

The analysis of the information gathered allows having an insight on how teachers conduct their assessment practice in FOD, in this particular case. Therefore and having such information into account, the hypothesis is proven to a certain extent. The hypothesis of this research projects reads that:

In most institutions where English is taught prevails the traditional ways of assessment when it comes down to ELT. It is only in few cases where teachers employ an alternative assessment which influences positively the language learning, but such

practice is related to the formation and the commitment of the teacher in his/her teaching ways, unlike the academic programs or the given conditions in these institutions which force or regulate the assessment, so it becomes standardize.

- Through the observations and the data analysis it can be established that in FOD prevails a traditional type of assessment – assessment of learning- through the application of tests at the end of each unit, a mid-term exam and a final exam. The results (in numbers) of these tests and exams make more than 80% of the entire grade for students to pass or fail, something that is already established by the institution and teachers must comply with what the system requires; whereas the other 20% is made up by more subjective features such as participation in which teachers tend to use more their criteria and they claim to do so by having speaking activities, others claim even making use of rubrics so results are clear to learners as they know what they should achieve contrasted to what they actually achieve. These can be considered as AFL since they provide feedback to learners and teachers state they act accordingly in order to guide learners towards successful learning. AOL through the implementation of tests and exams is an institutional requirement for teachers.

- It is clear that despite the fact that teachers are unaware of the concept of AFL, they do recognize the relevance of having some sort of observation on the students' learning and then adjust their teaching practice according to those observations or results. In other words, AFL is present in the classroom, even though it is not recognize as such and it is not done systematically as it should be done.

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