

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

Sandy T. Soto
Eder Intriago Palacios
Johnny Villafuerte Holguín
Coordinators



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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

Hamilton Quezada, MSc.: Holds a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Kansas State University and a Bachelor's degree in English Teaching from Universidad Técnica de Machala. He obtained two Go Teacher scholarships sponsored by the government of Ecuador; one to study a TESL training at Kansas State University, and another one for a Master's program at the same school. He teaches English for Academic Purposes in the English Language Program of Universidad de Investigación de Tecnología Experimental Yachay Tech, in Urucuquí, Ecuador.

Sandy T. Soto: Student of the doctoral program in Advanced English Studies: Linguistics, Literature, and Culture at Universidad de Vigo, Spain. She holds a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction ESL from Kansas State University and a Bachelor's degree in EFL Teaching from Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja. Currently, she teaches ESP at the Academic Unit of Business Sciences at Universidad Técnica de Machala, Ecuador. Her research interests include EFL teaching and learning, curriculum design, and professional development for EFL teachers.

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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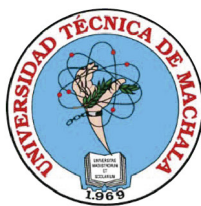
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