

# The Role of Evaluation in Second Language Teaching (June, 2022)

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**Abstract** - In the second language teaching and learning process, evaluation is not just a final score but a data collection research to help learners transition on their way to reach the target language. This process is an overrated concept whose purpose is to provide students with the necessary tools to embrace their language developmental sequence. The evaluation process involves determining factors such as teaching-learning strategies, learning environment, teaching methodologies, and cognitive targets. This study uses the method of comparison and analysis to state the relevance between the learning process and scoring as the final stage of evaluation, whose results are used as feedback to provide comfort and awareness to develop competence and performance during the teaching of the language. The findings of this research revealed that the evaluation purpose ends up being individually featured by each educator, and due to this, the learning process is compromised by three different factors which are the educator's ethics, the methodology of the course, and the group's performance. In the light of the results, a set of recommendations is addressed for future language teachers as a recommendation to overthink the evaluation process.

**Keywords:** Evaluation, Second language acquisition, teaching, learning process.

**Resumen** - En la enseñanza de un segundo idioma y el proceso de aprendizaje, la evaluación no es solamente una nota final, si no una recolección de información e investigación para ayudar al estudiante en su 'transición' en la vía a aprender el lenguaje esperado. Éste es un proceso que está sobervalorado y su función es el de proveer las herramientas necesarias para que los estudiantes refuercen su secuencia del desarrollo del idioma. El proceso de evaluación implica muchos factores como las estrategias enseñanza-aprendizaje, los ambientes de enseñanza, metodología de enseñanza y de los contenidos de aprendizaje que influyen los resultados. Utilizando el método de comparación y análisis, el estudio compara la necesidad de mantener un

balance entre el proceso aprendizaje y las notas obtenidas por el estudiante, quien a su vez recibe retroalimentación en base los resultados, para proveer una amena y más certera enseñanza del idioma. Los resultados de esta investigación revelaron que el propósito de la evaluación termina siendo una característica individual de cada uno de los educadores, debido a esto, el proceso de aprendizaje se ve comprometido por tres diferentes factores los cuales son la ética del educador, la metodología de curso y la creatividad del grupo. A razón de los resultados, un grupo de recomendaciones fue escrito para los futuros maestros como recomendaciones para que recapaciten el proceso de evaluación.

**Índice de Términos** - Evaluación, adquisición de un segundo idioma, enseñanza, proceso de aprendizaje.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the first stages of teaching, the evaluation process takes an important role in students' motivation and performance. When teaching a second language, this process fosters not only educators but also the students to pursue the approval of the evaluation strategy applied during the course. Ideally, this interest should motivate educators to research different methods, strategies, approaches, and techniques to provide an efficient methodology that fulfills all needs of students and professors during second language acquisition. Unfortunately, in most cases, the deserved importance is not shown.

For all students, learning a second language represents an important tool to open different opportunities and gain competence within the social market. However, going through the educational process in Costa Rica takes 5 years to complete the primary education stage; then, from 5 to 6 years to complete the secondary education stage, depending on the modality chosen, academic or technical. Even though almost 10-11 years are spent in the educational process, the educational system set up students to memorize and complete tests to approve or fail a course. However, this method may not promote the

understanding of language itself, on the contrary, due to the grades obtained, it could limit the communicative production and imagination of the students when using the language[10].

At this point, it is important to remark that part of this research is based on the experience gained during the teaching practicum of the English Teaching major. During this time, in a secondary education institution, a malfunction in the system and the evaluation process of second language acquisition could be noticed, and it was proved by analyzing the production of the students at the moment.

In addition, Phillips & Ehrenhofer in their study stated that the purpose of teaching a second language as “ the goal is not to explain what is easy or hard, but to understand what representations are constructed in real-time, how comprehenders figure out which representations are possible” [5]. These authors presented the main objective of second language teaching which is “communication”. Following the same idea, this paper is centered on the importance of evaluation and its impact on second language learning, the limitations of testing on learners, and the need for an evaluation centered on understanding rather than memorizing.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In second language learning, the teachers usually base their classes on testing students' knowledge rather than evaluating their understanding of the language. Taking into consideration that the understanding provides learners with sufficient knowledge to develop the language and use it freely, classes should be based on more social impact. In Indonesia, Universitas Jambi, Wulandari evaluated language learning strategies used by English students in which the results showed that most of the students center their learning strategies on metacognitive, social, and compensation strategies [9]. Since humans are social beings, it is normal to look for reinforcement and feedback inside society. This process leads this research to different questions such as, what involves learning a second language? What determines if the process is efficient or not? Is it the same to teach a language or other courses? Why does the evaluation have to be the same? To answer these questions, it is necessary to provide some context that provides acquaintance with the topic such as the concept of evaluation, assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, and testing.

### A. Evaluation

As the main aspect of this research, evaluations have been an integral part of society in governing since the dawn of civilization and in education since the late 19th century [6]. Nowadays, evaluation is a process that could be defined depending on the goals, approaches, and commands of the institution, which could be educational [4]. Taking into consideration that evaluation is malleable, some of the factors that could modify the appliance of an evaluation could be control, accountability, order, and so on. This malleability provides evaluators the ability to use the evaluation as a method to measure any aspect based on their parameters or specific characteristics. In the field of education, the evaluation is used to complement the measuring of the learning process in a student by using different methods of assessment such as tests, assignments, presentations, posters, essays, and so on. However, it is common to misunderstand the meaning of evaluation, and some people might think that it is the same as assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, or testing, but they are not the same but related.

### B. Assessment

When talking about assessment, William defines its functions as “ it is used to describe processes of evaluating the effectiveness of sequences of instructional activities when the sequence was completed” [8]. As it is portrayed by the author, the assessment is a tool that follows a process and evaluates the effectiveness of a process, educational or not, but it does not reach out of the parameters or topics that enclose that specific topic. However, the application of assessment may vary depending on the educator's method of assessment. Due to the evolution of the educational system, some educators rather than continue using the overused time-constrained exams, essays, and reports to assess; they have started using posters, annotated bibliographies, reflective commentaries, and so on [7]. The objective behind this different assessment is to promote the student's active participation in the target language.

### C. Formative assessment

When the term “ assessment for learning” is denoted, there is a connotation that moves the focus of assessment from a specific topic to a specific process. In their research, researchers such as Palm & Andersson [1] and

Worrel and Dixon [3] sustained that if the assessment is centered on gathering information and used to improve the student's learning process, the process is called formative assessment. When a formative assessment is used, not only the student is measured but also the teacher's methodology of teaching. As a result, the teacher enhances the participation and the learner compares possible results and different techniques to learn.

#### D. Summative Assessment and Testing

On the other hand, the summative assessment, unlike the formative, stands to measure the knowledge that the student has on a specific topic, and the main strategy to approach this process is "testing" [2]. Testing stands for tests based on the construction of a structured topic-based assessment in which students have to answer the questions correctly to prove their knowledge. Rahman establishes that "a test is something that demonstrates one's competence-incompetence, ability-inability; and that shows someone's position in the scale consisting of variables such as fail, pass, average, satisfactory, good, and excellent" [7]. In other words, summative assessment is used when the purpose is to classify a group of students between the ones that know and the ones that do not know.

### III. Methodology

This study was conducted through a case study design based on a comparison and analysis of the data obtained from the opinions of the postgraduate and current language teachers from the UNA. The answers are based on their experience during their teaching practicum at the MEP and their current practice with language students. These teachers are in constant interaction with the current educational system, and they are acquainted with the importance of evaluation in second language teaching. To validate this study, the researcher used a qualitative methodology in which the data gathered from the instrument applied and personal experiences carried out by the author are compared to the current methods of evaluation used in the teaching of a second language. During the development of the research, it is concluded that the evaluation process significantly affects the learner's development in a language class and willingness to learn despite the student's acquaintance with the language. In this case, the interest to express and contribute to the reality in the educational system motivated the researcher of the study to proceed with the development of this research.

### IV. Findings and Analysis

The moment of discussing the main findings of this study, it is taken into consideration the data obtained through the questionnaire conducted and the personal perspective of the researcher. Several factors could be noticed from the results. The most important is the educator's ethics, the type of the course, and the group's creativity. The understanding of these aspects could reveal the reason behind the unsatisfactory results of the evaluation process while learning a second language.

*1) Educator's role in the evaluation process:* During this article, it has been mentioned the importance of the evaluation in the educational field, but the importance of the educator as part of the evaluation is a key role to understand the meaning behind the effectiveness of this process. The results of the questionnaire showed that most of the participants think that the evaluation is linked to the willingness of the educator to improve the learning process. Even if the educator's motivation is minimal, it is important to mention that most of the participants showed to know the difference between concepts such as evaluation, assessment, and testing and their different uses in teaching.

The educators seem to be aware of the need to improve the evaluation process in the costarrican educational system, as all of them related the educational system as a reference point to improve the evaluation process. Some of the participants expressed that to focus the learning on the student rather than the grades obtained a radical change is necessary to be done. In addition, most of the participants stated that to teach a language, testing could be a good tool to measure the student's understanding, but it is not necessary in all cases. Additionally, Sometimes due to the testing process and focus of the course, the students center their attention on getting a good grade rather than learning the language. As a result, it is important to pay attention to the needs of the students before doing an evaluation, but in the end, it is up to the educator if the process is centered on the learning or the scores.

*2) The influence of the course type on the evaluation process:* In the questionnaire, the participants explained that they agree with the premise that the course type must define the evaluation and that not all the courses have the same pedagogical necessities. In addition, some of them stated that because it is a language lesson, it is a must that the evaluation would be focused on understanding and production. However, some answers mentioned that there

is not a specific evaluation and the type of the course does not define what is correct and what is not. Even though most of the participants agreed on the use of progress and needs-based evaluation, some of them argued that there is a need for both assessments, formative and summative, for the evaluation to be complete and accurate. Given that the findings confirm the statement done at the beginning of this study and shed light on the central issue of the evaluation in the process of learning and teaching a second language, it is significant to pay attention and restructure the evaluation plan.

3) The “ideal” evaluation for language teaching: Several physical and social factors could affect the creativity of a person or a group. In the questionnaire, the participants were asked about their ideal evaluation in a language class; most of them answered that they can only relate the word “ideal” if there is some context or some data about the group such as place, social environment, local economy, and so on. On the other hand, some participants sustained that the evaluation should have a more motivational and physiological focus taking into account that the educational process should be enjoyable for the students and not a scary process in which they have to approve or give the best they could to “fit” the expectations. A general finding that was found is that most new language teachers agree that this process must be based on the student's needs. These statements support and confirm the main issues of this research which was to prove that our educational system must be changed in the evaluation of language learning. Nowadays, the system is stuck in the testing pass or fail the courses and not teaching to enjoy the new language.

#### V. *Conclusions and recommendations*

The next conclusion could be drawn from the analysis carried out to the data compiled from the informants. Accordingly, educators and postgraduate students pointed out that some factors such as personal feelings, course type, motivations, and creativity could affect the adequate appliance of the evaluation during the teaching process. In addition, the current study reveals a problem based on the lack of motivation of students beginning with the encounter of minimal or inexistent support from the system which forces them to put their motivation away to accomplish a goal established in a program. Therefore, the same educational system limits the creativity of the students by keeping the memorization standard of evaluation which limits the development of the language. The results of this study showed that the learners and teachers of a second language experience different levels

of motivation depending on their goals, and these goals are defined by how students approve or fail the courses. These approving or failing features are closely related to the educational system's goals in language courses, and sometimes those goals could not be further from the reality in the classrooms. Adding to this, one of the findings of this study is that according to all participants' perspectives all courses must be centered on the student's learning. This rehearses the fact that nowadays not only students but also educators, are just centered on finishing the course, providing the materials needed, and approving it at the end of the cycle.

The evaluation, in the future, will struggle to bring back the motivation lost due to the modifications faced by the educational systems. All those changes instead of improving have brought down the quality of education and have turned the system into a repetitive machine that should produce the same results over and over again. From personal experience and after having conducted this study, It is necessary to do a change in the educational system and improve the understanding of the language by promoting participation and the production skills instead of pushing students to obtain a grade to be classified as the ones who know and the ones that do not.

Sometimes, as educators, it is important to recognize that teaching a language goes beyond just helping the students to approve the program. It could represent the future opportunities for the students, and the impact that this process has could have severe repercussions on the student's life. If the system changes for good; eventually, teachers will start doing the same, and they will teach students according to the most general problems that they may face in a world where communication is a source to keep on the rail of success.

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