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> TEACHER'S KEY BRIEFCASE AND THE ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to generate transformations in the learning assessment processes applied by Spanish teachers in secondary education in order to develop students' language skills. To this end, a virtual briefcase was created and applied, designed with interactive links for teachers easily access a study plan and useful strategies. Framed in a qualitative approach, the procedure was organized in three stages: diagnosis, collective construction and evaluation of changes. This was conducted through interviews, surveys, discussion groups, training workshops and a focus group. Data analysis was done using validated techniques such as: Atlas. Ti, a convergence and divergence matrix, a class observation processing matrix, rubrics, Google Forms questionnaires, among others. The findings establish a need to optimize the teaching assessment exercise mediated by ICT. As a result, it is evident that in the implementation of the prototype created, called the Teacher's Key Briefcase, teachers reconsidered their evaluation methods and included students' language skills. Thus contributing a strategy of great value based on its original, effective, creative, and motivating nature for both teachers and students.

Keywords: learning assessment, language skills, ICT.

Introduction

Nowadays, learning assessment is one of the main concerns in education. According to the report of the Ibero-American Cooperation Program in evaluation of the quality of education of the OEI (2016) several countries are at least one year of schooling behind the OECD (including Colombia), lagging two years behind of schooling with the OECD countries.



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At national level, results of learning assessment such as 2018 SABER 11 Tests show that difficulties in communication, reading and writing skills are considerable. This is where language skills become involved. However, consolidating the present research, required addressing two essential categories: learning assessment and language skills.

The former can be defined as the activity aimed at the assessment of the process and results of students' learning, with the purpose of guiding and regulating teaching to achieve educational goals (Gonzalez, 1999). The latter is understood as a person's skill set to communicate effectively following both grammatical and linguistic rules (lexical, phonetic and semantics (Chomsky, 1970)).

An important characteristic of these skills is that they are cross-cutting in any curriculum (Le Boterf, 2001; Perrenoud, 1997; Whiddett and Hollyforde, 2003). These emphasize the abilities to interpret, argue and propose, in which the skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing are implicit; in addition to the dimensions of knowledge (knowing), skills (knowing how to do) and attitudes (knowing how to be), MEN, 2006.

Based on the aforementioned, it is of the utmost importance for teachers of Spanish become the main agents of change and transformation of students' deficient structures (Reuven Feurstein, 1991). Moreover, to encourage language skills establishing spaces for social interaction that stimulate rational and critical communicative action (Habermas, 1981). Also, it is important to consider feedback in the teaching-learning process through strategic evaluation environments (Tiburcio Moreno,

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2016). It is important to involve students in their own learning (Ausubel, 1968; Flavell 1976; Glaser 1994; Maslow, 1942; Roger, 1942), as this can improve their interest in the evaluation processes, develop their language skills with more assertive communication, personal growth and progress in the final results.

Table 1Final Academic Results 2019 in the Basic Subjects Assessed by ICFES.

Superior Valuation	Math	Spanish	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences	Philosophy
	2	0	0	0	0
High	4	2	5	7	8
Basic	29	33	27	30	20
Low	2	2	5	0	9

Note: Authorized information. Adapted from institutional archives.

This table shows that current evaluation practices reflect low academic performance in terms of language skills. This is a problematic situation that should be subject to a detailed process of observation and analysis. Thus, in the midst of Covid-19, ICTs became a relevant and indispensable tool in the educational process. In a society mediated by the use of digital languages, environments and interactions (Den Exter, Rowe, Boyd, & Lloyd, 2012; Lim, Chai, & Churchill, 2010; Newell, Pembroke, & Boyd, 2012), it becomes necessary to highlight the training of teachers and students. In the teacher as a guide, motivator and evaluator of the process of language skills development; and in the student to be more willing and competent towards studying

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(Panadero, 2014; Zimmerman, 2000; 2003), maintaining attitudes, aptitudes and qualities that allow them to develop into authentic and receptive beings that learn how to learn (Bruner 1976).

In that regard, the general objective of this research is to generate transformations in the learning assessment process aimed at developing language skills in the remote modality in secondary education at an institution in Magdalena. Four teachers who work in this area in the 10th and 11th grades were initially involved in the study.

This article is arranged in four sections. The first presents the theoretical foundations and the literature review on the development of learning assessment and language skills; the second describes the methodological design of the research in stages; the third reports the results obtained in each stage; and the fourth introduces the discussion and conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories that underpin a new concept of learning assessment regard evaluation as a phenomenon that allows addressing changes in curricular structures through common policies that are based on the development of competencies (Santos, 2015). In this matter, Saavedra (2019) points out that it is important for teachers to take up the challenge to change the way they evaluate and for students to learn and apply that learning in their lives. De Zubiria (2017) stresses the concept of evaluation and its intentionality towards learning as dialogical pedagogy implicitly evaluates learning from

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language skills. These theories support this research because the learning assessment is linked to the real context experienced both by teachers and students.

On the other hand, the concept of language skills is supported by theorists such as Tobon's (2013) theory of socio-training. Above all, it intends learners to identify, analyze, argue and solve context problems based on an ethical life project, entrepreneurship, collaborative work, metacognition and development of complex thinking. Another important theory is Labarrere's, (2016), who refers to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZDP) – of great relevance for this study – because it is oriented towards the development of students' skills and the participation of subjects in development contexts under the guidance of adults (teachers) or in collaboration with other more capable subjects (students). Similarly relevant, the theory of Habermas (1989) mentions a process of dialogue with arguments that respect interests, equality and freedom. It provides a civilization of communication applied in the student environment, to attain a level of communicative competence that allows them to debate and defend their differences and let the best arguments win. This, within a social environment of healthy coexistence. Likewise, Diaz Tenza (2018) proposes a new school in which he considers the future of education is necessarily related to the development of competencies and the incorporation of new technologies and the flexibilization of learning. From this approach, the study of Garré (2015) is noteworthy, he states that the use of multimodal texts is effective for the creation of communicative situations among

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educational agents and develop language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking from a language perspective through ICTs.

In Colombia, looking to achieve an articulation between pedagogy and technology to improve language and communication skills, the studies by authors such as Arrieta, Florez and Martinez (2010) are important. They consider that the use of technology constitutes a challenge for language sciences, contributing the need for a new vision of technological tools to this object of study.

Method

This research is framed within a qualitative method. It is based on nonstandardized data collection methods. Data collection consists of obtaining participants' perspectives and points of view (their emotions, experiences, meanings and other subjective aspects). Interactions between individuals, groups and collectivities are also of interest. The researcher asks general and open questions, collects data expressed through written, verbal and nonverbal language, as well as visual, which he describes and analyzes and converts into themes, i.e., he conducts the inquiry in a subjective manner and recognizes his personal tendencies (Sampieri, Fernandez-Collado and Baptista Lucio, 2014).

On the other hand, according to Sampieri, Fernandez-Collado, Lucio (2014; pp. 170-191) "the sample in the qualitative process is a group of people, events, occurrences,

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communities, etc., on which data will be collected, without necessarily being representative of the universe or population under study".

The sample in this research is made up of four Spanish teachers who work in 10th and 11th grades. They have more than 20 years of experience and have worked at this institution in Fundacion, Magdalena, for more than 13 years. Their ages range from 43 to 55 years, all of them have specialization studies and one of them has a master's degree. They participated in surveys, interviews, classroom observations and focus groups to inquire about their way of assessing students' language skills.

In addition, the sample includes a mixed group of thirty-seven 11th graders, whose ages range from 15 to 18 years. Teachers' opinions regarding the assessment exercise were contrasted with the students' opinions. This sample of students complements the analysis at the beginning and at the end of the research pertaining to academic results obtained in terms of their language skills evaluation process. The study has three key stages: Diagnosis (planning), collective construction (acting) and evaluation of changes (observing and reflecting). Teacher training is followed by the application of the tool that has been designed; finally, the results are observed and evaluated applying techniques and instruments validated by an expert.

PROCEDURE OF STAGE 1: Diagnostic or Data Collection: The first step is the collection of data, which responds to objective 1. For this purpose techniques and instruments such as the following were applied:

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A rubric to undertake a documentary review of the Spanish curriculum to obtain accurate information about processes, planning, competencies, strategies, and assessment. This was analyzed by means of a rubric. Then, a non-participant observation rubric was used to remotely observe (through the Zoom platform) the pedagogical exercise of the Spanish teachers in the three moments of the class. These classes were analyzed using a class observation processing matrix. Subsequently, an interview questionnaire was conducted virtually (through the Zoom platform). The data obtained was coded using Atlas. Ti. Eight questions were asked to inquire about how teachers were assessing students' language skills. For example: What strategies, instruments or techniques do you use to assess your students' language skills? The data obtained was analyzed by means of a convergence and divergence matrix. Finally, an interview questionnaire in Google Forms was applied to the students of these teachers to contrast the opinions expressed, aimed towards evaluative methods and the development of language skills in the classroom.

STAGE 2: Collective Construction or Creation of the Virtual Tool: This begins with the reflection process of the teachers of the area. It follows purpose number 2. A contribution of ideas, by means of a discussion group through the Zoom platform, took place. Then, the training workshops followed by means of a Webinar (via Google Meet). In order to achieve this purpose, a questionnaire of six open-ended questions addressed to the teachers under study, submitted for discussion, was applied, e.g., How could you

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define skills-based assessment? What significant experience on language skills assessment can you share? The data obtained from this instrument was analyzed using the Atlas program. Ti.

STAGE 3: Implementation and Evaluation of the Teacher's Key Briefcase:

This stage begins with the implementation of the prototype developed with the teachers of the area (the Teacher's Key Briefcase). It responds to purpose number 3 of this research, which involves contrasting the changes in the learning assessment process, taking the development of language skills as a frame of reference. The instrument applied to the teachers at this stage is an interview questionnaire consisting of seven open-ended questions, as a guide for conducting a focus group. Example: Do you consider that the use of the Teacher's Key Briefcase generates an effective and innovative means of assessing language skills in your classroom practice (please explain)? These questions and answers were analyzed with a matrix of convergences and divergences.

Results

It should be noted that the path through the different previous stages was possible due to the systematization of data through tools, applications and platforms such as Atlas Ti, Google Forms, rubrics, class observation processing matrix and formats such as convergence and divergence matrices. Based on the aforementioned, emerging codes and categories were extracted, including assessment strategies and virtual tools. After a

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detailed and systematized analysis of the instruments applied, the initial purpose of this research was achieved, yielding the following results:

RESULTS OF THE DIAGNOSTIC STAGE: *Update the Spanish Curriculum*: the most relevant findings are mentioned in the documentary review of the Spanish curriculum:

The Spanish Study Plan of the institution is outdated because it does not contemplate the current legal basis issued by the MEN, it does not include virtual resources for the teaching-learning process, and, although evaluation criteria are mentioned, assessment strategies are not specified. In addition, co-evaluation, heteroevaluation and self-evaluation formats are not in place. It also lacks an academic improvement plan for this subject.

Regarding class observation, the deficiency in the strategy to explore students' previous knowledge stands out in the first moment. In the second moment: dynamic strategies were not applied to develop the students' language skills; the teachers did not show adequate proficiency of the virtual tool selected to develop the class. In the third moment: they did not design an instrument that would allow them to assess students' language skills, nor did they use the assessment to develop these skills.

Thus, the observations clearly evinced a need to intervene and to **reorient the teaching assessment exercise**. Teachers reflect knowledge of the topics covered but

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remain rooted in a traditional educational conception that is transferred to a remote format. From the results of the teacher interview, the following may be highlighted: In the learning assessment category: Teachers are clear about the concept, purpose and importance of assessment; however, they fail to achieve optimal results in the tests with the evaluation strategies implemented. None mention technological tools as part of their teaching and learning assessment exercise.

In the language skills category: They attribute the low level of skills to the foundations of primary school. They consider it essential to develop competencies so that students can enhance their skills and that these will lead them to develop others, once they are able to interpret, argue and propose adequately. They agree that there is a need for a pedagogical and didactic unit to develop competencies from primary school.

However, results of the student surveys on learning assessment and skills development showed that 58.2% of the teachers schedule the assessment sessions with the students. That is to say, the attitude of dialogue with the students for their evaluation process is not constant; thus denoting a need for reflection and rethinking in the way of assuming the evaluation. On the other hand, only 53.5% apply varied methodologies, showing the need for training in accordance with the changes of society. 61.1% make creative use of technological resources. Therefore, teachers must appropriate virtual teaching-learning environments in order to achieve significant progress.

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RESULTS OF THE COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION STAGE *How did the Teacher's Key Briefcase work:* In the discussion group, teachers mention that the pandemic has forced them to see things differently and to analyze competencies within a context; they confess deficiencies in the use of ICT and clearly state the need to redefine their evaluation practices, suggesting the possibility of creating a repository of activities for students to develop their communicative skills: reading, speaking, listening and writing. A website is created: <u>https://olhenatic.com/</u> to respond to the educational needs mentioned above in the focus group and the Teacher's Key Briefcase is located there. Subsequently, five training workshops were held with a massive attendance, not only by Spanish teachers, but also by teachers of different areas. The subject matter of each training workshop is specified below:

Workshop #1: Reflecting on remote education. It was taught by a master's in education and member of the PTA (*Programa Todos a Aprender*), who led a reflection in which teachers had the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings regarding this unexpected change and to catch up with the current notifications issued by the MEN.

Workshop #2: What is the Teacher's Key Briefcase? It is a virtual briefcase designed for Spanish teachers to have easy access to a package of more than 100 available links, which will enhance students' language skills, in order to assess learning through the development of these skills.

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Figure 1

Initial website interface



Source: original site capture.

The website presents an initial interface with a menu bar containing the following: a landing page, the Teacher's Key Briefcase, reflection, learning assessment, language skills, curriculum, blog tabs and other resources. In these sections, strategies for evaluation, self-evaluation, co-evaluation and hetero-evaluation formats are visualized. Within the category of language skills, various options are displayed for each of the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. In addition, teachers can modify or create their own rubrics and add content that they consider relevant to their area and make comments about the material.

Workshops #3 and #4: Rising to the challenge. Teachers take on the challenge of exploring the different links of the Teacher's Key Briefcase and share the most significant ones for the evaluation process. In these sessions the teachers reacted positively, making contributions to complement the contents of the Briefcase.

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Workshop #5: Contributions, participations and certifications. Other important and noticeable links for remote education are highlighted; managers and teachers expressed their opinions regarding the applicability and benefits of the Briefcase. Finally, agreements were reached to continue with this training process in subsequent meetings, coordinated per groups, and to continue its use in virtual classes.

Regarding the evaluation of the training workshops in Google Forms, pertaining to the question: How do you feel after the cycle of five workshops? 75% of the respondents were very motivated to transform their evaluation practices, 15% were too motivated and 10% were not very motivated. To question number 2: Your assessment of the evaluation of language skills through virtual tools such as the Teacher's Key Briefcase after the workshops cycle is? 85% replied it is necessary and 15% that it is possible to use the Teacher's Key Briefcase. Therefore, the application of the Briefcase has nurtured evaluative practices.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION OF CHANGES STAGE: *Learning Assessment Transformation:* This stage responds to objective number 3 of this research; it involves the intervention of the focus group and a matrix of convergences and divergences. It is evinced that teachers were clear about the concepts of assessment and language skills. However, they admit to having low level in technological resources' management; they spontaneously express their traditional ideas about evaluation; they recognize that, from the training workshops and the presentation of the Teacher's Key

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Briefcase, they began a reflection process, enriching their expectations about the new way of evaluating and developing students' competencies. There were no divergences. Examples of these classes and new ways of assessment can be found in the Ciudad Educativa platform, which is included in the Briefcase. The following table shows that the average in critical reading was maintained.

Table 2

Comparative Results for SABER 11

	SUBJECT	2019	2020
1	Critical Reading	54	54
2	Mathematics	55	53
3	Natural Sciences	51	49
4	Social Sciences	47	48
	AVERAGE	51,75	51

Note. Authorized information. Adapted from institutional archives.

It can be seen that despite the remote education context driven by the pandemic, reading proficiency is the highest score compared to the other subjects below 54 points in 2020.

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Consequently, teachers' reflection and implementation of the Teacher's Key Briefcase was a relevant and functional tool in their classes. It also managed to keep the students engaged in its development despite the drawbacks of their own reality.

Discussion and Conclusion

In response to this research's formulation, in the process of learning assessment, it is important to remember Labarrere (2016), who refers to Vygotsky with his theory of the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1988). This theory is applied in this study based on an induced reflection throughout the process and up to the teacher training workshops so that teachers reach the optimal level and knowledge in the management of the Teacher's Key Briefcase and generate transformation. This website should be used to steer assessment processes and the development of language skills supported by ICT, considering Garré (2015) in terms of the importance of multimodal texts, which is relevant in the promotion of reading and the development of language skills, and leading up to meaningful learning, (Ausubel, 1968). It is important to mention that there were also limitations in this research path. The sudden closure of the schools was an initial adversity, since many of the instruments were planned to be applied in person; however, this was overcome in a timely manner through some of the virtual platforms that were later included in the Briefcase, thus demonstrating its functionality and relevance.

Thus, according to the studies and prominent theoreticians who address the issue of learning assessment and language skills, this study ratifies the importance of De

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Zubiria's (2006) dialogic pedagogy. And concludes that, according to Santos (2015) after motivating reflection processes regarding curricular structures based on the development of language skills, it is possible for teachers to take on the challenge to modify the way in which they evaluate so that students learn and apply the learning in their lives. In the same way, the theories mentioned above by Tiburcio Moreno and evaluation for learning concur. Diaz Tenza, with his proposal for a new school, and Tobon's, with his life project aimed at socio-training and the development of life skills, all of these and the research herein converge in terms of generating changes in teachers' evaluative methods. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the aforementioned theories and studies were the basis for the transformation in assessment. Which should be oriented towards ICT and language skills since they are cross-cutting to all areas of knowledge, De Zubiria (2017). These elements are enough to spark a discussion of the agents participating in this study to provide a concrete response to the formulation proposed in this research.

TEACHERS: "After using the Teacher's Key Briefcase in our classes, it can be said that it is a fundamental tool for further work and better use of technology to assess students' language skills. Very appropriate for this time of remote learning. It has transformed us; it has made us unlearn".

THEORETICAL: Pablo Diaz Tenza, (2018) in his book: *Hacia una nueva escuela*, proposes an education in which the curriculum inputs notions about memory, motivation,

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neurodidactics, language, ICT, the roles of the teacher and the student. It suggests a reflection on the reality of the classroom.

RESEARCH: The Teacher's Key Briefcase is an effective, necessary and innovative tool; it provides the resources discussed by teachers and theoreticians in this research to assess students' language skills.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended to include computational competences to help students find solutions and teach them to think. Furthermore, to continue training teachers to institutionalize this resource and cultivate the Teacher's Key Briefcase on site. On the other hand, it is suggested to continue researching to measure the impact of this tool in the institution. Finally, it is recommended to use the Spanish curriculum uploaded in the updated Teacher's Key Briefcase, it is available for all teachers who take on the challenge of learning assessment to develop students' language skills in times of remote education.

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