

**Enhancing Transparency to Improve Second Graders Performance
in Oral Assessment in the English Class**

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Abstract

This action research was conducted with second graders and their parents at a school in Cauca (Colombia), a total of 28 participants. The Edmodo platform was implemented as a strategy to improve transparency in the oral assessment in the English class. Three different data collection techniques were applied: observations, focused-group interviews and two questionnaires. These techniques were used to determine participants' perceptions about learners' performance in the oral assessment in the English class when using the Edmodo platform as a tool to enhance transparency. The results evidenced that information about assessment on the platform per se does not have a great impact on students' preparation and performance in oral assessment, and that students did not have direct contact with the platform as parents were the transmitters of the information. Findings allowed to conclude that commitment of parents and students is necessary in order to allow transparency to benefit their preparation and performance for oral assessment.

Keywords: transparency, washback, oral assessment, virtual platform

Resumen

Esta investigación se realizó con estudiantes y padres de familia de segundo grado de una institución educativa en Cauca (Colombia) con un total de 28 participantes, en el cual se implementó la plataforma Edmodo como estrategia para mejorar la transparencia en las evaluaciones orales de la clase de inglés. Se aplicaron tres diferentes técnicas de recolección de datos: entrevista, cuestionario y observación. Con estas se trató de conocer las percepciones de los participantes acerca del desempeño en las evaluaciones orales en inglés al implementar la plataforma Edmodo como estrategia para incrementar la transparencia en la evaluación. Los resultados proponen que la información de la plataforma por sí sola no tiene gran impacto en la preparación y desempeño de los aprendices; además, que los estudiantes no tuvieron un contacto directo con la plataforma ya que los padres eran los transmisores de la información. Por lo tanto, se concluye que necesario el compromiso de los padres y estudiantes con el fin de permitir que la transparencia beneficie la preparación y el desempeño de éstos últimos en las evaluaciones orales en la clase de inglés.

Palabras clave: transparencia, impacto, evaluación oral, plataforma virtual

Introduction

According to the organization of the International Baccalaureate (2018), the assessment principles are the basis for creating, correcting, and granting assessments and valid grades.

Within these principles is the transparency that is related with the justice in assessment.

According to Rogier (2014), “transparency refers to the availability of information to students.

Students should be aware of the skills, vocabulary, and grammar that they will be expected to learn, and they should receive a clear explanation of how these will be assessed” (p. 7). The

purpose of transparency, according Palsgaard and Paulsen (2009), is “to enable students and teachers to see and follow the work of fellow students and teachers within a learning

environment and in that sense to make participants available to each other as resources for their learning activities" (p. 2). Having said the above, the duty of the English teacher is to take into

account the meaning of transparency in all assessment processes.

Nevertheless, it is not enough for teachers to know the assessment principles, it is important they apply them. Maturana (2015) claims that transparency provides clear information on the assessment process and has influenced the decisions made about it. Therefore,

transparency provides students clear instructions, criteria, and objectives. As Rogier (2014)

explains that transparency gives to the student’s valuable information about the assessment such as the purpose, form, and manner in which the evaluation is to be carried out, allowing them to

have a basis on the criteria that will be taken into account in the assessment process. Hence, this principle can not be set aside, since it is essential for a good assessment performance.

Despite all the importance that the authors highlight about transparency, it can be seen that in most contexts; transparency is a principle to which no attention is paid. Teachers most of the time do not have any clarity or knowledge about it, therefore this generates a negative

washback in the students. Understanding Washback, according to Messick (1996), as “washback, a concept prominent in applied linguistics, refers to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning” (p. 241). A negative washback may cause anxiety, fear, and depression, affecting the assessment moment and their learning process.

This negative washback caused by the lack of transparency in assessment can be evident in an English class with kids who are expected to perform orally. Therefore, it is important to establish strategies that help to put the aforementioned principle into practice; especially when virtuality and distance can affect the students' understanding of the information, they have the right to know in the assessment process. One way to enhance transparency in this scenario is to use virtual tools such as Edmodo for students and parents to have clarity about the assessment process in the English class. into practice is to implement virtual tools.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of transparency on washback effects through a virtual platform in oral assessments for second graders in the private school in Caucasia and the question that guided this study was: How can transparency through an Edmodo platform contribute to the generation of positive washback effects in English oral assessments for second graders at a private school in Caucasia?

Literature Review

In order to attain a better understanding of the research report in this text, it is important to first approach the concept of Washback, Oral assessment, transparency, and Educational Platforms.

Washback

Washback is involved in a complex of issues related to teaching and learning. According

to the literature review, we have found that the term washback has been studied in many contexts and from different approaches, however, this review is focused on analyzing the research that has been done in relation to this concept, transparency, oral assessment, and educational platforms.

It is important to highlight the definition of this concept provided by Messick (1996, p. 241) “washback, a concept prominent in applied linguistics, refers to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning” In addition, Brown according to Gates (1995) states that exists two ways in which washback may vary: It can range from positive to negative washback and from strong to weak washback; with this in mind, Brown mentions some factors that affect the impact of washback, including transparency (p.30).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that Brown according to Gates (1995) points out that different factors converge that affect the impact of washback negatively; within those factors that affect this phenomenon he says that one of them is the lack of "Transparency.

Transparency

Now the concept of transparency, according to the literature review is a relatively little studied concept, (Maturana, Arias & Restrepo, 2012) defines it as “grado de claridad y precisión en la información de la prueba acerca de procedimientos, propósito, ponderación, calificación, tiempo, entre otros.” (p. 104). Likewise, transparency is not only an important factor in assessment however, has to be reflected in teaching. According to Winkelmes (2013), in his study on transparency and teaching, it is based on the idea that students’ learning outcomes improved when they understood how and why instructors had structured their learning experiences in particular ways". Another feature of this concept is addressed as part of the principles of fairness in assessment. Although, this vital principle has not been given the

prominence it deserves. We have found that most studies have related transparency exclusively to the use of rubrics; the large percentage of studies in the literature conclude that the rubric works as a good strategy to increase transparency in the classroom.

As we mentioned above, we have evidenced in the literature review that in the field of assessment, the principle of transparency is a little addressed construct. However, most of the studies found are directly related to this principle with the rubrics and their impact on transparency. García-Ros (2011) points out transparency as one of the qualities perceived by students and teachers in studies on the usefulness of rubrics as assessment tools (p.1051).

In the research carried out by Picon (2013) "The rubric and fairness in assessment", he supports the thesis that the use of consensual rubrics guarantees to a great extent the promotion of fair evaluative practices. Therefore, these rubrics increase validity and transparency in assessment. Likewise, among the findings it was found that good rubric design "increases transparency in evaluation by providing detailed instructions for the evaluative task and an analytical rating scale" (2013, p.88). Furthermore the author quotes Suskie (2002) who says that defining and sharing with students the expected results of the task and the rubric with which their learning will be evaluated as one of the strategies to follow in the search for fairness. Also integrates certain beneficial practices such as using consensual rating scales with students, both to evaluate them and to guide their self-assessment, actively involves them in the process, and will yield positive results in terms of: They know what the teacher expects from them, they find the grades meaningful, students internalize the criteria, which empowers them to argue their judgments at the time of evaluation. Finally, the transparency of the rubric coupled with the participation of students in its design and implementation; allow both them and the teacher to

learn from the event and develop an evaluation of formative nature where feedback occurs naturally and continuously (Picon, 2013).

On the other hand, research conducted by Jonsson and Prins (2019) mentioning that the use of rubrics can be beneficial for student learning is not always clear what type of knowledge has been assessed, for that reason, these researchers propose explicit criteria beyond just the rubric. However, another study found cited by Jönson (2017) support the idea of sharing explicit assessment criteria with student may positively affect student performance, reduce anxiety, as well as support students' use of self-regulated learning strategies (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013),

The goal of this study was therefore to investigate the influence of increased transparency in assessment on student motivation, and performance was carried out in 8 groups of elementary school students. In conclusion, this study sought to assess how explicit criteria could positively impact their motivation for learning, finding that although the results varied among the different groups, the level of transparency increased.

However, another study found assesses some of the negative effects found in the explicit criteria. Baartman and Prins (2018) affirm that "Transparency of assessment criteria may make clear to students what is expected nevertheless the use of it produces certain consequences". According to Torrance (2007), "It may produce students who are more dependent on their teachers and may weaken rather than strengthen the development of self-regulated learning and learner autonomy".

It is worth mention the concept of transparency is expanding at the same time as it is being researched. Therefore, we see it relevant in our context to investigate what other possible strategies besides the rubrics and explicit criteria can benefit the positive effect on transparency in the classroom. However, our study will focus on oral assessment, since we have evidenced in

the context in which we are immersed that oral assessment is one of the forms most used by teachers in primary grades in order to assess performance in the second language. On the other hand, as for oral assessment and transparency, we did not find any study that was related. Nevertheless, there has been research that evaluates the impact of oral assessment on washback.

Oral Assessment

Although, different definitions of oral assessment have not been found, Crawley (2007) provides an approach defining it as "an oral presentations of tasks and projects, by the teacher providing feedback on the oral presentation per se and giving some feedback on content and eventually creating some dialogue" (p. 3). On the other hand, Joughin (2010) shares a simpler and more general definition of the same concept, saying that "Oral assessment refers to any assessment of student learning that is conducted by the spoken word" (p. 3). From the Ministry of Public Education, oral assessment is conceived as an oral test that is used to measure the skills of oral comprehension and production in the communicative competence of foreign languages. During its application, students understand verbal messages, answer questions posed by the teacher or solve communicative situations in interaction with others (p. 5).

On the other hand, in a study conducted in Colombia, the objective focused on finding the washback effect of an oral assessment system on some areas, and include teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language. The study was carried out with 110 students from a private university. Data were collected by teachers and students, through class observations, and external assessments of students' oral performance. This oral sssessment system was implemented from the use of a set of rubrics for different levels of competence, each of which provided a scoring scale from one (1.0) to five (5.0), to assess oral criteria, such as, communicative effectiveness, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Additionally, ongoing assessments were

implemented so that students can demonstrate the extent of their knowledge and abilities and detailed and specific feedback. The main finding was related to the use of the system appropriately and therefore increasing positive washback inside the classroom.

Another oral assessment study provides instructors the opportunity to probe student explanations, Obtaining a more complete picture of their understanding. Additionally, oral assess allow for flexibility in how students can explain their thinking, potentially helping build students' identities as statistical thinkers and speakers. This research was carried out in the last quarter of 2020 and the first of 2021. The participants were 60 students from California Polytechnic University, who only received oral assess from the following dimensions: knowledge, structure, comprehension, orality, authenticity, and interaction. The strategy of group collaborations of 3 to 4 students was implemented, to give the students a space of low consequences and in this way the students received credit for participation and could progress in the expression of their thoughts, so that at the moment. The oral production of the assess was more natural. For the assessment qualification a rubric was used, which determined that some of the questions of the oral assess had more power than others. The results found that many students displayed a more advanced ability to articulate their own thinking and situate their reasoning in a context familiar to them. However, due to the lack of exposure of students to oral assessments, it is normal for some students to feel anxiety around this type of assessment.

In previous studies on oral assessment, the use of rubrics as an assessment strategy is also reflected in the analysis of the wide use that has been made of this tool. Therefore, the use of rubrics as an all of the above has led us to propose a possible methodology that enables transparency in order to generate this positive washback beyond rubrics, we propose educational platforms.

Educational Platforms

Pérez and Gardey (2015) state that “a virtual platform is a system that allows the execution of several applications under the same environment, giving users the possibility of accessing them through the Internet.”. Virtual platforms are generally used for distance education and attempt to simulate the same learning conditions that occur in a classroom. Although, each platform may have different characteristics, they usually allow students to interact with each other and with teachers. For this purpose, they have several communication channels, such as chat, forums, etc. In addition to Conole and Culver’s (2009) web advances offer “numerous opportunities to create innovative, engaging and pedagogically effective learning opportunities” (p. 3).

Another study we found in the literature, that addresses the concept of transparency and web platforms, was conducted in Turkey at a language institute. Settiawana and Hilmawanb (2016) affirm the importance of transparency in assessment; they point out “testing will not seem so complex or beyond comprehension for students if teachers provide transparency in their assessment”. This research was conducted at the Language Development Center of UIN Suska Riau. The objective of the study was to explore the key concepts for planning an assessment that is useful, valid, reliable, practical, and authentic. One of the strategies implemented by the Language Development Center is to increase the transparency and was to publish the specifications of the test and inform the students about the grade point from their website, so that the students knew the skills that would be assessed and thus improve their learning and reduce the measure of taking assess. In other words, the idea of developing this principle is through

transparency, students are empowered as learners rather than fearful of the tests (Rogier, 2014, P.368).

In conclusion, we have realized that there are still many gaps in what corresponds to the principle of transparency and washback in the classroom; it can also be said that there are very few studies that have addressed transparency as an essential practice. Research has been directed to the use of rubrics as a mechanisms to give transparency in assessment, furthermore, little has been searched in terms of the use of virtual tools to give clarity, not only about the grades or criteria for students' performance but whole aspects related with the process (objectives, characteristics of the procedures, criteria, weighing (20%)requirements, consequences)and for to generate a positive impact.

Methodology

This study was developed by the action-research methodology with the purpose of enhance the transparency in the oral assessment through Edmodo platform to students of second grade English class of school in Caucasia.

Context and Sample

This research was developed in a private school in the municipality of Caucasia with students and parents of second grade. It Was observed that the students did not have active participation during the assessment process. Besides, the transparency in the assessment moment it was little the part on the teacher, this generated a negative washback in the students. Therefore, the use of the Edmodo platform was implemented as a strategy where parents and students could find all the information about the assessment moments, with the purpose of improving transparency and, in turn, generating a positive impact on students. towards their performance in the oral assessment in English class.

The second-grade classroom was made up of a total of 30 students between 7 and 8 years of age, of which 14 decided to participate in the research with their respective parents, however, only 7 students were active participants in the project.

Data Collection and Analysis

The intervention plan for this research was:

First, parents and students were informed about the research that was going to be carried out in the English class and that the project was going to be implemented through the Edmodo platform. Afterwards, the strategy was presented to them through a video tutorial in which it was explained how it worked, and where they could find all the information related to the evaluative moment. Once all the information from the Edmodo platform had been detailed in a clear and assertive way, the observation was implemented as the first data collection technique in the two evaluative moments of the project, with the purpose of examining the proposed strategy and its contribution to transparency in the oral evaluations of the English class.

Moreover, as a second data collection technique, an interview was proposed for parents and students to collect the perceptions of the participants about the transparency provided by the Edmodo platform in the oral evaluations in the English class, however, none were received a response from parents and only 7 interviews were obtained from students.

Finally, the questionnaire was suggested as a third data collection method, in which it sought to establish what was the washback generated with the implementation of transparency in the performance of students in the oral evaluations of the English class, it is worth mentioning that for at this moment only 3 parents and 1 student answered the questionnaire

Once all coding was done, we created categories which allowed us to determine themes.

Findings and Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to determine how transparency affects the development of oral assessments with second graders. Results reveal that 1) Although the information uploaded in the Edmodo platform is clear and free for parents and students, but this doesn't generate a relevant impact. 2) Therefore, the lack of commitment was evidenced by those involved, in addition there was very little interest in the information that was in the Edmodo platform and finally it was reflected that 3) the students had an indirect relationship with the Edmodo platform, since they depended entirely on their parents to access this information.

The information regarding the assessment (objective, criteria, resources, etc.) by itself does not generate a positive impact on the performance of second graders in oral assessments in the English class.

Data analysis revealed that although the information on the Edmodo platform was clear, complete and easily accessible, it did not generate a good impact on the participants, this due to the fact that parents did not enter the platform to learn about the content displayed there, and because of the age of the students, they did not verify the information on their own either. Like participant # 1 expressed to us that he did not use the platform, and he did not know that he could use it to study for his oral English assessments.

Commitment from parents and students is essential to allow transparency to benefit second graders' performance in oral assessments.

Results from data analysis evidenced that the response of parents to the information on the platform regarding the development of oral evaluations in English class with second-grade students was mostly negative, since only one case of commitment was perceived and Interest of the participants towards the development of the project, as participant # 7 said during the

interview that he did use the platform and that he used it to see the assessment information and do Tasks.

On the other hand, in one of the communication channels with the parents, as evidenced that some of them did not interact with the Edmodo platform at any time, for example, parent # 1 said that he did not know how to log in and that it was his first time trying to do so he hadn't tried until the end of the project.

Students established an indirect interaction with the information on the Edmodo platform regarding the oral assessment in the English class; it occurred through the accompaniment of their parents.

In the cases in which a positive impact on student performance was observed, there was indirect accompaniment from the parents since the parent reviews the information on the Edmodo platform and then communicates it to the student. As a case in point, the participants # 6 in an interview expressed that he did not review the information on the platform because his uncle was the one who entered it and then gave him the instructions.

Although it is understood that, due to their age, parents' support is necessary, students have a total dependence on their parents and it was noted and, therefore, the participants' lack of interest in the information on the platform was evident. It is worth mentioning that it was expected that the students would have a direct interaction with the platform and with the whole process, but as evidenced in the third finding, an indirect relationship was established.

According to the research found on transparency and taking into account the findings of this research, it can be stated that:

No research was found that was related to our project, since there are no studies that seek to improve transparency through a virtual platform, on the other hand, the only strategy that

could be identified in all related studies to increase this principle has been the implementation of the rubric, as mentioned by Édgar Picón Jácome (2013) when saying that the rubric is made up of certain characteristics which establish the evaluative tasks, these are: Instructions, determined time of the test or task, method of evaluation and qualification. (p. 80). It should be noted that with what has been learned in the evaluation course, it can be said that the rubric is not an instrument that defines transparency but is part of a set of items that are necessary for it to be evidenced in the evaluation process. Finally, in terms of transparency, neither studies were found which involved parents as participants in the research.

During the research process we came across different situations which were limiting for its development because at the beginning the project was well received to the point that there were 14 participants, but later some were continuously disinterested. Additionally, there was only 2 hours of English per week and on some occasions that time was interrupted by extracurricular activities at school, which caused the process to be delayed and therefore less time was had to meet all the objectives of the school. investigation. Finally, in times of pandemic, the institution offered students a virtual support alternative (platform), consequently, confusion was generated between the two platforms, the Edmodo platform and the institutional platform, at the time of data collection with the students.

Conclusions

To conclude, it should be noted that the Edmodo platform alone does not generate a significant impact when it comes to improving transparency in the oral assessment of the English class in second-grade students. Therefore, the teacher needs to create different strategies that ensure the interaction between participants and the platform used. On the other hand, parents

must be immersed and committed in the process of their children, since being so young, students need to be helped by an adult to fulfill their academic commitments.

Finally, the findings obtained from this research can contribute to the implementation of a virtual platform as a strategy to provide students with transparency in English assessments, highlighting that the commitment of parents, students, and the teacher is necessary for its good development of this. Therefore, future research is invited to delve deeper into the concept of transparency using virtual platforms in classrooms and how it should be implemented in the assessment processes.

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