

**English Assessment Course as Meaningful Learning for the Construction
of Teacher Identity**

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Medellín

June, 2023

Abstract

This case study research aimed to determine the contribution of the English assessment course, in terms of the meaningful learning it generated, to the identity construction of pre-service teachers from the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó in Medellín. Two pre-service teachers were selected after they had taken the English assessment course. However, they took this course at different moments and with different teachers. Besides, it is important to mention that one of the researchers also played the role of a participant. Participant (1) narrated his experiences during and after the course; on the other hand, participant (2) answered six questions related to the methodology implemented by the teacher, lessons and experiences in the course, and changes experienced in his teaching identity. This was made through an interview. The data analysis led to identify that previous knowledge about assessment was widely linked to the experiences lived in school and college by the pre-service teachers, where their teachers implemented assessment only for summative purposes and sometimes their design lacked reliability and validity. Nevertheless, once the pre-service teachers acquired the new theories about assessment, a cognitive change occurred, which allowed the pre-service teachers to rethink the concept of assessment and therefore to apply appropriate assessments in their classrooms.

Keywords: English assessment, meaningful learning, teacher identity

Degree Requirement

This case study research project is submitted as a requirement to graduate from the Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages Teaching – English (Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés) at the School of Humanities and Education, Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, in Medellín, Colombia.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my advisor, Jose Vicente Abad, for his ongoing support and guidance. Conducting this case study research project and writing this report would not have been possible without his support. He was a light in a crucial moment of my career.

I would also like to thank my parents and family for their patience and unconditional support.

In addition, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the teachers who participated in this study. My gratitude goes to the teachers who taught the assessment course, especially to professor Erika Marcela Restrepo, who is an excellent teacher.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1 Statement of the problem.....	6
1.2 Literature review.....	6
1.3 Conceptual framework	7
1.3.1 Assessment.....	7
1.3.2 Meaningful learning.....	7
1.3.3 Teacher Identity	7
1.4 Research question	8
1.5 Research objectives	8
1.5.1 General objective	8
1.5.2 Specific objectives	8
2. Method	9
2.1 Research Design	9
2.2 Context and Data Sources.....	9
2.3 Participants’ Selection and Sampling.....	9
2.4 Data collection.....	10
2.5 Data Analysis.....	10
3. Findings.....	12
3.1 Participants’ assessment knowledge.....	12
3.2 Teacher methodology	12
3.3 Towards a new perspective.....	12
4. Discussion	14
4.1 Conclusions	14
4.2 Limitations and Further Studies	14
4.3 Lessons	14
References	15
Appendix A: Interview Protocol	17

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

The study of assessment has become an important aspect of the educational field. Although assessment is continuously applied in classes, teachers have different concepts, perceptions, and beliefs about this topic, especially in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Assessment has been associated with teacher identity (Looney et al., 2018; Mansouri et al., 2021). This term refers to the perception that a teacher has of themselves, which is built from experiences linked to their pedagogical work (Pennington & Richards, 2016). So, the teacher's identity is influenced by those beliefs and assumptions the teacher has constructed through experiences such as assessment.

Hence, many universities in different parts of the world have included assessment courses in their teacher training programs, which allow pre-service teachers to strengthen their assessment competencies, in this case in English teaching. The aim of these courses is that pre-service English teachers learn to plan and implement reliable, valid, authentic, fair, ethical, practical, and interactive assessments. In an indirect way, the lessons acquired in these courses become meaningful for pre-service teachers' construction of identity as they transform erroneous beliefs and perceptions about assessment for the benefit of students' learning.

1.2 Literature review

During the last decade, there have been different studies about assessment in the classroom. Some of them related this concept with pre-service and in-service teachers' perceptions and beliefs about assessment (Eyers, 2014; Levy-Vered & Alhija, 2018; Schneider & Bodensohn, 2017; Seden & Svaricek, 2018).

Some studies showed pre-service teachers' dissatisfaction with the type of assessment training they received during their pre-service training and how they changed their perspectives of assessment in the practicum (Koloi-Keaikitse, 2016; Xu & He, 2019). Other studies focused on how teachers developed their assessment literacy and how it contributed to their professional identity (Looney et al., 2018; Mansouri et al., 2021).

However, based on the antecedents, there has been no research directly involving assessment and teacher identity in the fields of English teaching.

For pre-service and in-service teachers, it is not enough knowing about the types, methods, and purposes of assessment. English teachers must also know what they are assessing, having a complete knowledge of the competencies that make up the teaching of a second language.

For this reason, the aim of this research is to determine the contribution of the English assessment course, in terms of the meaningful learning it generated, to the identity construction of pre-service teachers from the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. To that end, I posited the following research question: How did the English Assessment course contribute meaningful learning for the identity construction of pre-service teachers from the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó?

1.3 Conceptual framework

1.3.1 Assessment

It is a ubiquitous part of classroom life. Most exchanges between teacher and students are an occasion for considering the quality of student work. (Atkin, Black, & Coffey. 2001).

1.3.2 Meaningful learning

It is usually described in terms of cognitive development and changes in the learner's cognitive structure (Ausubel & Fitzgerald, 1961; Novak, 2002). In meaningful learning, the knowledge learned must be relevant to existing knowledge and feature significant concepts and issues (Novak, 2002). Meaningful learning involves the interpretation of new information and experiences by connecting them with prior knowledge (Okukawa, 2008; Wolfe, 2006).

1.3.3 Teacher Identity

It is the self-perception, self-image, and self-awareness that each teacher has built throughout their life and career through the interaction with other people and different contexts, which generates different characteristics, beliefs, values, and experiences in the teacher. Continuous reflection, research, and class intervention further strengthen teacher identity. (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

1.4 Research question

How did the English Assessment Course contribute meaningful learning for the identity construction of pre-service teachers from the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó?

1.5 Research objectives

1.5.1 General objective

To determine the contribution of the English assessment course, in terms of the meaningful learning it generated, to the identity construction of pre-service teachers from the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó.

1.5.2 Specific objectives

- To describe the essential elements (objectives, evaluation activities, methodology, teaching style) of the English Assessment course.
- To reconstruct, through narratives, the meaningful learning experienced by the pre-service teachers while taking the English Assessment Course.
- To analyze how the meaningful learning derived from the English Assessment Course influenced the construction of the pre-service teachers' identity.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The interpretive paradigm enables researchers to treat the context of the research as unique considering the participants involved and their particular circumstances (Alharahsheh et al., 2020). Framed within this paradigm, this study explored the experiences lived by two pre-service teachers during an assessment course, and how it modified their beliefs about assessment and thereby led them towards constructing a new identity as teachers.

Through case studies, researchers hope to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved (Hancock et al., p 10, 2021). Following the qualitative tradition, I aimed to attain a deep understanding of the research object through an in-depth exploratory case study that enabled me to find quality responses (Alharahsheh, et al., 2020). This study also involved auto-ethnographic elements, as the researcher was one of the participants.

2.2 Context and Data Sources

The research was carried out at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, located in Los Colores neighborhood in Medellin. This university offers an English Teaching program known as Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English. Inside this program, there is a course called "Evaluación en inglés," which consists of three credits and whose essential objectives are: (1) To analyze trends in language teaching and learning and their impact on assessment; (2) to interpret the principles and qualities of assessment and its impact on the evaluative practices of the foreign language teacher; and (3) to plan reliable, valid, authentic, fair, ethical, practical, and interactive assessments. (Evaluación en Inglés course plan).

2.3 Participants' Selection and Sampling

Participants were selected after they had taken the English assessment course in the bachelor's degree in foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English. Just two students joined the study. They took this course in different moments and with different teachers. The main reason for selecting these participants was that they agreed when they said that this course was meaningful for their identity as English teachers. It is important to mention that one of the researchers also played the role of participant, and the other was in the last semester of the bachelor's degree. This last participant authorized his participation in the research through an informed consent.

2.4 Data collection

In the case of the first participant, data were collected through narratives, which were developed using guiding questions to cover all the study's central categories. For the second participant data were collected through an interview, which was conducted online due to the lack of time to do it face to face. For this phase, I designed an action plan relating the specific objectives of the study and the data collection instruments for collecting data (see Table 1).

To collect data for the first specific objective, I considered reviewing archival documents like the course syllabus (proyecto docente) and course plan (carta descriptiva). I had access only to the latter because the teacher in charge of the course did not have the other document. Hence, it was necessary to include in the narratives and the interview questions related to this objective (see Appendix 1)

Table 1. Research Design

Specific objectives	Data Collection & Analysis
To describe the essential elements (objectives, evaluation activities, methodology, teaching style) of the English Assessment course.	Archival Document Analysis. Syllabus. Course plan.
To reconstruct, through narratives, the meaningful learning experienced by the pre-service teachers while taking the English Assessment Course.	Written Narratives. Interview.
To analyze how the meaningful learning derived from the English Assessment Course influenced the construction of the pre-service teachers' identity.	Analysis of archival documents. Interview. Narratives.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process. I first created a category tree with three main categories and eleven sub-categories. Afterwards, with the aim of relating the categories and sub-categories with the data I used color-coding while implementing open coding. Both the narrative and the interview were analyzed this way. After each analysis I wrote memos about what the data

were telling me. I also consolidated a matrix where descriptions and interpretations of the data collection analysis took place. This matrix allowed me as a researcher to choose the most important information according to the objectives proposed by this study.

Finally, in order to avoid bias and ensure trustworthiness, I applied a peer scrutiny strategy, so I shared the analysis of data and the matrix with one partner who was also doing research by herself. We gave each other feedback and recommendations for possible misunderstandings according to our own data analysis. Besides, I had debriefing sessions with my research advisor, who gave me feedback during all the study.

3. Findings

3.1 Participants' assessment knowledge

The data revealed that the participants' previous knowledge about assessment was widely linked to the experiences they had in school and college, where their teachers implemented assessment only for summative purposes, and sometimes their design lacked reliability and validity. On this matter they commented:

“Durante mis prácticas pedagógicas, la implementación de las evaluaciones que realizaba en las clases estaban muy influenciadas por los profesores que había tenido anteriormente y como ellos me evaluaban, así evaluaba de igual manera a los estudiantes” (P1).

“Yo creo que cuando uno va a iniciar este curso uno llega con una idea muy errada de lo que comprende la evaluación” (P2).

3.2 Teacher methodology

The data showed that the teachers in charge of the course implemented both independent work and teamwork activities, using discussion and analysis to reach learning agreements. The course methodology was framed in the practicality of the theory, i.e., the pre-service teachers developed practice work in accordance with the theory seen in class. This application of the theory involved the creation of a rubric for a final task and workshops where evaluations proposed by other teachers were analyzed and contrasted with the theory. Besides, it was a very organized course because it always kept a sequence. Participant 2 described it as an excellent course in the sense of the coherence that it kept between what was taught and what was assessed. The excerpts below evidence this finding.

“La docente casi siempre dejaba trabajos independientes. Luego, en clase, ella pedía que conformaran grupos para socializar el taller y compartir aprendizajes, preguntas o inquietudes.” (P1).

“Fue un curso que dio en el clavo; de verdad, nunca había visto un curso tan coherente en lo que enseña, de lo que se trata el curso y lo que evalúa... fue coherencia pura el curso” (P2).

3.3 Towards a new perspective

Participant 1 was amazed by the course; he realized that, like him, many teachers (before receiving this type of training) have a misconception about assessment. For this reason, it was

necessary to make a change regarding the way it was conceived. Participant 2 discovered that it was easy for him to implement the new assessment concepts he had learned. All this led him to have a radical change in his self-conception.

“Cada lección, cada clase era un momento para asombrarme, un momento para comprender lo mal que estaba yo y que están muchos docentes actualmente con relación a este tema.” (P1)

“Era momento de incluirme en esta nueva identidad docente, percibirme a mí mismo como un docente que comprende la importancia real de la evaluación para lograr las metas académicas propuestas.” (P1)

“Me di cuenta gracias a este curso que yo tengo habilidades para el tema de la evaluación, para encontrarle toda esta parte lógica a los procesos evaluativos. Entonces me hizo literal un cambio completo de idea de autoconcepción.” (P2).

4. Discussion

4.1 Conclusions

Meaningful learning involves the interpretation of new information and experiences by connecting them with prior knowledge (Okukawa, 2008; Wolfe, 2006). The course generated meaningful learning in both participants because once the pre-service teachers acquired new theories about assessment, a cognitive change occurred, which allowed them to rethink the concept of assessment and therefore to apply appropriate assessments in their classrooms.

Teacher identity has to do with the perception that every teacher has of themselves, which is built from experiences linked to their pedagogical work. When pre-service teachers start a bachelor's degree in language, they bring with them experiences lived at school or college. They remember how their teachers taught and assessed them, and they assume that that is the way in which it should be taught; this is called situated identity (Pennington, & Richards, 2016).

Thanks to the English Assessment Course, however, pre-service teachers understand that rooted beliefs about assessment are partially or totally wrong. At this moment, they begin to deconstruct that situated identity, thus changing those beliefs and values to build their own perceptions, their own images, and their own teaching identity (Looney et al., 2018).

4.2 Limitations and Further Studies

The first limitation was the lack of time since I had to start this research project from zero in Maestro Investigator V. The second limitation was that I could not get the course syllabus, but I got the course plan. Finally, I could not interview the teacher in charge of the course, but I could include another participant. Therefore, I would like to recommend that further studies get the course syllabus and interview the teacher in charge of the course.

4.3 Lessons

The English assessment course is essential to train teachers to know how to assess students in the classroom. It gives the certainty that pre-service and in-service teachers are really assessing their students according to what was taught. It is what finally allows them as teachers to know that they have not deviated from the objectives and that their students have achieved the necessary skills to continue advancing in their learning.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I. Preparation

- Greet the interviewee.
- Offer the person to answer the interview in English or Spanish.
- Request authorization to record the session.

II. Introduction:

1. What is your name?
2. What semester are you in?
3. How long ago did you take the evaluation course?
4. Who was the teacher?

III. Content

5. What were your initial conceptions about assessment before taking the course?
6. How did your conception of assessment changed after taking the course?
7. How was the English evaluation course meaningful for you?
8. How have you implemented those lessons in your own teaching practice?
9. How have the lessons learned and implemented influenced your own perception and identity as a teacher?
10. What was the methodology and teaching style implemented by the teacher during the course?

IV. Closing

11. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation the assessment course and how it influenced you as a teacher?
12. Thanks for your time and honesty.