

Language Assessment Literacy of Secondary Language Teachers Belonging to Some Public and  
Private High-Schools in Pasto

By

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Paula Liliana Rodriguez Eraso

Submitted to the School of Human Sciences in partial

Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of B.A.

in the English and French program

Linguistics and Languages Department

University of Nariño

March, 2019

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**Nota de Responsabilidad**

Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en el siguiente trabajo de grado son responsabilidad exclusiva de los autores.

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**Nota de Aceptación:**

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San Juan de Pasto, Marzo de 2019

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## Resumen

La evaluación es un elemento crucial en el aprendizaje y enseñanza del Inglés como lengua extranjera ya que este proceso continuo permite a docentes y estudiantes analizar y replantear aquello que ha sido enseñado y aprendido durante el desarrollo de las clases, razón por la cual, los docentes son los principales responsables de ejecutar y lograr un proceso de evaluación significativo, a partir del conocimiento y manejo de los aspectos que esto implica.

Hoy en día, dicho conocimiento es conocido como *Literacidad en la Evaluación de Lenguas*, un concepto que reúne los factores y la información necesaria para evaluar adecuadamente el desempeño de los estudiantes; lo cual implica entender que la evaluación no puede ser reducida simplemente a la aplicación de exámenes para obtener calificaciones.

En ese orden de ideas, el presente estudio de investigación se enfoca en describir la alfabetización y el conocimiento que tienen los profesores de Inglés respecto al proceso de evaluación que ellos están llevando a cabo en nuestro actual contexto educativo colombiano, esto permitirá identificar las principales prácticas evaluativas que influyen en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes de educación media de algunos colegios públicos y privados; y de la misma manera permitirá identificar y determinar los principales aspectos necesarios para la correcta aplicación de la evaluación durante las clases. Para tal fin, los docentes serán sometidos a entrevistas semi-estructuradas y observaciones en clase. Los resultados de este estudio proveerán información útil que podría contribuir al campo de la evaluación en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del Inglés.

*Palabras clave:* Lengua extranjera, Literacidad en la Evaluación de Lenguas, enseñanza–aprendizaje del Inglés.

### **Abstract**

Assessment is a crucial element in the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language, since this ongoing process allows teachers and students to analyze and reconsider what has been taught and learned throughout the development of classes. Thereby, teachers are the main responsible for executing and achieving a meaningful assessment process based on the knowledge and management of the aspects that this implies.

Nowadays, that assessment knowledge is known as *Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)*, a concept that gathers the necessary factors and information to assess students accurately; it also implies to understand that assessment cannot be simply reduced to the application of tests to get grades.

In that order of ideas, this paper focuses on describing the literacy that English teachers have regarding to the assessment process they are carrying out in the current Colombian educational context, this will allow to identify the common assessment practices which influence the learning of students from middle education of some public and private high-schools; and in the same way, it will allow to identify and determine the main required aspects for the correct application of classroom assessment. For this purpose, teachers will be subjected to semi-structured interviews and observations during class. The findings of this study will provide useful information that could contribute to the assessment field in the English teaching and learning.

*Keywords:* Foreign language, Language Assessment Literacy (LAL), English teaching and learning.

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## **Language Assessment Literacy of Secondary Language Teachers Belonging to Some Public and Private High-Schools in Pasto**

### **Introduction**

During the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language there are many components that play a fundamental role. One of those factors is assessment, which cannot be only considered as the application of a test in class, but as any systematic procedure to collect information about students' achievement. This information has to be interpreted and used to make judgements and decisions about the performance of teachers and students in the teaching and learning of English (López and Bernal, 2009). In that sense, assessment could be considered as a key foundation that allows to know to what extent this mentioned process has been carried out successfully or not, showing the possible failures and merits that both teachers and students have.

Assessment could be said, is an indicator about how teachers conduct and develop their classes, and how it influences the teaching practice, and therefore, the pupil's learning. Pointing out this, it could be affirmed that assessment is not a simplified task; it requires effort, time, dedication and a wide knowledge from teachers. Thus, the concept of Language Assessment Literacy (henceforth LAL) emerges, and a call to put it into practice is necessary in the English language teaching field. Bearing in mind this, among other factors, language teachers must possess and develop appropriate skills such as the creation, application and interpretation of assessment activities to become assessment literate (Rogier, 2014), which must currently contemplate that it is necessary for teachers to leave aside the misconception of applying assessment of learning but applying assessment for learning (López and Bernal, 2009).

On this way and considering the above mentioned, it is very useful to know how local English teachers understand and manage the different aspects that assessment involves and how this process is applied to their lessons. In other words, it is suitable to describe how literate teachers are in language assessment, specifically in the language context in Pasto.

The information obtained from this study will allow the researchers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of English and how it impacts the learning of students; at the same time, it will allow to make decisions disclosing possible contributions, suggestions or solutions that will probably help to improve the way how English teachers assess students in the current educational context in Colombia.

Considering the final purpose of this research, the research problem, the literature review and the research methodology will be described in detail to carry out with this study.

## **Chapter I**

### **Research Problem**

The research problem of this project points out the importance of describing how literate English teachers are in language assessment, therefore, it is necessary to highlight the level of knowledge, management and awareness teachers possess regarding this essential factor and its implications in the learning of students. In that sense, LAL has a relevant role for both teachers and students, and its implementation in Pasto educational context could be a contribution to identify what strengths, weaknesses and challenges the local educational system face currently.

### **Problem Description**

The problem that this study will deal with is based on different research studies, some of them carried out in Colombian universities with pre-service and in-service teachers, who were expected to have a high domain on language assessment, however, most of them demonstrated to have some weaknesses and flaws regarding this practical topic. Bearing that in mind, the researches make to analyze and bring into question the way how English teachers are managing and applying assessment practices in high-schools where teachers, who are specialized in this subject, are required to make students achieve a proficient and adequate English level.

Following the above, it is known that English classes depend mainly on teachers, who in turn, could have some difficulties and challenges in the suitable development of assessment activities. As it has been mentioned in different studies, assessment is a basic pillar of the English curriculum; however, according to Nunan (1988 as cited in López and Bernal, 2009, p. 56), it is the area in which many teachers make evident their lack of confidence and vague knowledge. In the same way, Herrera and Macías (2015) also support this claim and state that the

knowledge of teachers in assessment is insufficient. That could be one among many others reasons (such as class time, large classes, classroom conditions, national educational policies, etc.) which interfere with the development of a great variety of enriching assessment activities that teachers could apply in their lessons and on the contrary, they simply conceive assessment as a tool to classify the students' learning by numbers, as Popham (2004) states, many educators define assessment as a quantitative term which only focuses on the difficult process of calculating grades. It seems that teachers ignore that assessment must be a formative process for students and not a set of grades that determines if they have learned or not.

Likewise, it might be that English teachers do not go beyond thinking that assessment refers only to assign marks and make it summative; as Pérez, Guerra and Ladrón (2004) mention “some language teachers commonly conceive assessment as an isolated activity (separated from teaching); they equate assessment to simply giving a grade or score, and apply it as a summative process rather than an ongoing process” (as cited in López and Bernal, 2009, p. 56). Hence, it could be said that in most cases, teachers are not aware of activities, criteria, methods and strategies to assess students accurately.

Considering this, the previous statements cause a reflection on the process of language teaching in the Colombian context, specifically in some public and private high-schools at 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades in Pasto where it is supposed that students acquire certain English proficiency throughout a good language assessment implementation at the end of the secondary education. Consequently, there is a need to apply a study that enables the educational community to know how knowledgeable secondary English teachers are in language assessment, even more when in 2009, the Colombian educational system implemented the *Decreto 1290* which states that schools are allowed to design their own assessment system (López, 2010). This decree has

already become a great challenge for schools since the members of the school community do not have enough experience designing formative assessment systems in all the areas of learning including, evidently the English area (López, 2010).

Here the interest to carry out this research lies, since the results obtained could contribute to have a better understanding about the assessment practices English language teachers are implementing in Pasto.

### **Problem Statement**

#### **Question.**

How literate are secondary English language teachers in language assessment?

#### **Sub questions.**

- What do teachers understand by language assessment literacy?
- What are the most common assessment techniques used by teachers to assess their students?

### **Objectives of the Study**

#### **General objective.**

To describe the literacy of secondary language teachers in language assessment.

#### **Specific objectives.**

- To examine the understanding of teachers about language assessment literacy.
- To identify the most common assessment techniques used by teachers to assess their students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is relevant in the field of English teaching and learning because it could allow to know more about what is involved in public and private educational settings regarding language assessment and how teachers are carrying out this process in different institutions in Pasto, Nariño. This may show how literate educators are in assessment. Herrera and Macías (2015) state that teachers are expected to have a working knowledge of assessment to support their instruction and to effectively respond to the needs and expectations of students, parents and the school community; this assertion evidences the importance and the role that teachers perform when they are primarily entrusted with the task of applying assessment to the class.

Taking this into account, this study could contribute to the identification of failures, strengths, necessities and challenges that English teachers present in LAL, probably, in order to reflect on and improve the way how they put language assessment into practice, and at the same time to increase the learning of students and the community in general terms. In the same way, it is fundamental to mention that it is necessary to begin to change that misconception of considering that assessment is just measuring or assigning grades; it is time to start to talk about assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning (López and Bernal, 2009). Thus, the essential purpose of assessment should be based on providing students a constructive learning that allows them to be aware of that and encourages them to continue improving, since students' learning cannot be understood as the simple numerical result of what they learned during a certain period of time.



### **Limitations of the Study**

There are three main limitations to face during the development of this research paper. These difficulties can cause variations in the results when collecting the data since the setting, methodology and techniques of the study might be affected.

Most teachers would be afraid of being observed and questioned since they may think this could affect their reputation and performance as English teachers. Therefore, as researchers it is a responsibility to clearly establish what the objectives of this study are and to explain the teachers that it could be a great step to improve the English teaching and learning in high-schools from Pasto.

Teachers would not allow to carry out the application of the techniques proposed in the study (semi-structured interview and observation) as this would probably interrupt the normal development of their lessons. For this reason, teachers would be explained that the objective of this study is to get information with the purpose of identifying some strategies to improve the way how to assess students and reassure them that their classes would not be disturbed at any moment.

Also, it is possible to find difficulties with the techniques proposed in this study which are observation and semi-structured interview. Maybe, there would not be enough time to have reliable information during the observation or the semi-structured interviews which could bring unreliable results regarding the established problem of this research. To avoid this type of limitation, it is necessary to follow the recommendations and instructions indicated by the research adviser and carefully formulate the questions' interview and the observation format before applying them.

## **Study Delimitation**

### **Conceptual delimitation.**

*Assessment.* According to Chandio and Jafferie (2015) assessment is an ongoing process that allows teachers and students to know whether the teaching and learning process is or not being carried out in an effective way.

*Language assessment literacy.* LAL is defined as “the knowledge, skills and principles for contextualizing, planning, developing, executing, evaluating, and interpreting language assessment” (Fulcher, 2012, as cited in Giraldo and Murcia, 2018, p.58).

### **Population delimitation.**

This research will be carried out with a group of six English teachers, from three high-schools in Pasto (one private and two public). These teachers will be heads of the English subject in their respective institutions; thus, they will provide general and complete information about what it is required in the study.

### **Geographical delimitation.**

This study will be developed in three high-schools from Pasto, Nariño: one of them will be a private high-school and two other public high-schools. They are located in the urban area of the city and attend students from pre-school, basic and middle education.

After having stated the problem of this study and its components, it is fundamental to present shortly the main concepts and ideas taken from some relevant authors in language assessment, and in the same way describe some studies that support this research, as it is shown in the next chapter.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

Frank (2012) asserts that assessment is the way teachers identify the learners' needs, document their progress, and determine the role they must perform as teachers and planners. This concept has given rise to different ways about how a teacher can appraise the performance of students, in such a way that they can achieve a successful learning. Thus, this study will focus on describing how teachers deal with this aspect in their English classes.

Along these lines, the theoretical background will be developed below to review what assessment implies, understand its meaning, characteristics, classification and the importance that this factor involves in order to contextualize and know how literate English teachers are regarding assessment.

#### **Assessment**

Grajales and Tapasco (2013) define assessment in a general context, as the action of making a judgment, identifying the strengths and weaknesses that students have in their learning process. This is, assessment as an indicator that reveals how significant has been what students have studied and learned. To broad this concept, Chandio and Jafferie (2015) define assessment as an ongoing process that allows teachers and students to know whether the teaching and learning process is or not being carried out in an effective way. It can be considered as a factor that shows how teachers are implementing their teaching strategies and contents, and how students are incorporating them into their learning. Also, assessment can be defined as "any method used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses." (Dietel, Hernan and Knuth, 1991, as cited in Dikli, 2003, p. 13). This implies that teachers must not only

consider a test to assess students, but also, a wide variety of methods and strategies that they can apply during their English classes.

### **Difference between Evaluation, Assessment and Testing**

Bearing in mind that in the teaching field it is common to use terms such as assessment, evaluation and testing, it is important to clarify and establish the difference between these concepts since they are related but are not the same.

The meaning of evaluation refers to the collection and interpretation of information about the curriculum (Nunan, 1999, p. 85, as cited in Faustino, Kostina and Vergara, 2013, p. 357). That is to say, evaluation verifies the general performance of an educational institution involving teachers, students, administrators, among other participants and factors which play a part in the teaching and learning processes.

Generally, it is a final procedure which must be appraised by impartial judgments where, students' knowledge is tested, and the results obtained are used by evaluators to determine the quality level of an educational institution.

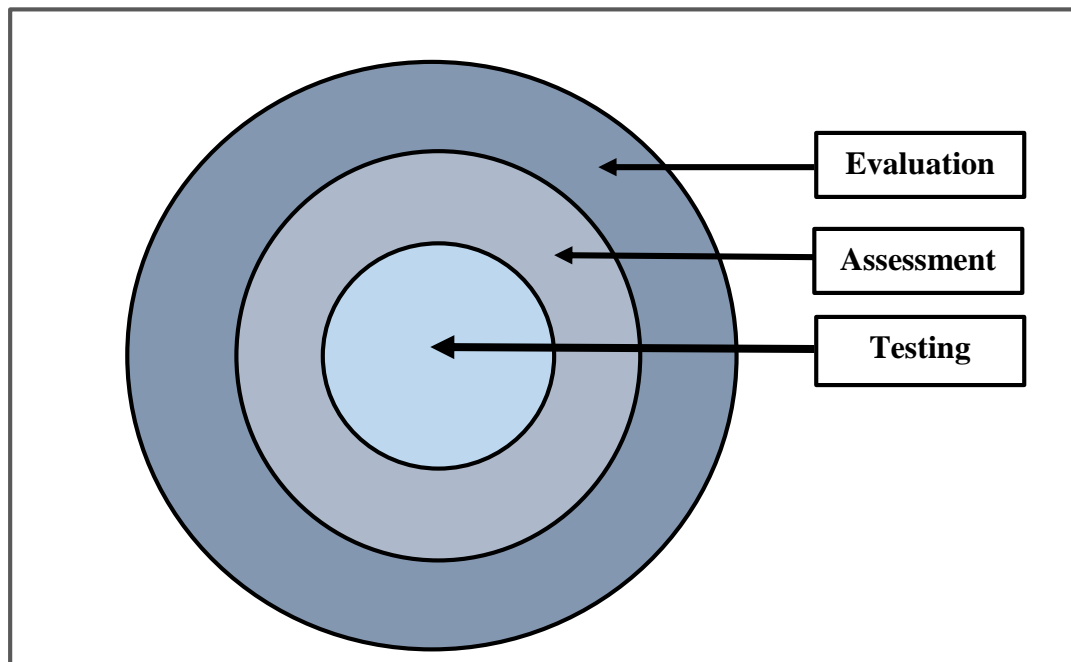
On the other hand, assessment as a general definition is part of the evaluation process, which allow teachers to detect what factors can benefit or affect students' achievement (Becerra, 2006). It attempts to collect relevant information about the decisions educators want to make as a result of evaluation (Genesse et al., 1999, as cited in Becerra, 2006, p.36). That means, assessment allows not only to verify how teachers and students are carrying out the academic processes, but also to identify and to give possible suggestions or solutions to potential problems or difficulties teachers and students could face during the processes of teaching and learning.

Assessment represents a more interactive process between students and teachers. It is applied during and after the instruction, taking into account learning and teaching practices developed in class. Assessment outcomes are gathered, analyzed and used to make adjustments for improvement of educators and learners performance.

Concerning testing, Brown (2004) states that “tests are prepared administrative procedures that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum when learners master all their faculties to offer peak performance, knowing that their responses are being measured and evaluated” (p.4). These determine how much students have learned, generally making use of numbers to determine the level of knowledge they have acquired.

A test is one of the multiple ways of assessment, it can be considered as an instrument used to measure particular tasks, the learner’s performance, skills or knowledge that has been attained at a specific point in time. It also serves to examine the effectiveness of instruction or the aspects of this to be improved.

To have a better understanding of these three relevant concepts, below there is a graphic (figure 1) which summarizes what is explained above.



**Figure 1.** Evaluation, Assessment and Testing – (Taken from Gottlieb, 2006, p. 86 as cited in Gottlieb, 2016)

Thus, figure 1 shows the relationship between testing, assessment, and evaluation pointing out that evaluation is a general process where assessment and testing are immersed and where this last term can be understood as a tool to assess learning.

### **Classification of Assessment**

Considering that assessment involves strategies, activities and procedures which teachers use and apply in the classroom, it is relevant to know that there are different types of assessment that can be used during the development of a lesson. They can be categorized in the following way:

**Informal and formal assessment.** According to Brown (2004), informal assessment refers to the resources that teachers use to give impromptu feedback to the student. It is not planned but it just emerges when students are developing an activity in the classroom; for

example, when a teacher says to a student “I think you meant to say you ‘broke’ the glass, not you ‘break’ the glass”. Here the teacher is using a way of assessment which was spontaneous and unpredictable but gave the student a meaningful learning. Informal assessment designs tasks without recording results and making fixed judgements about a student’s competence. On the other hand, the same author, defines formal assessment as the exercises or activities specifically established to develop skills and knowledge. They are systematic, organized and planned techniques that provide teachers, information about the student achievement.

**Formative and summative assessment.** Brown (2004) states that formative assessment is to evaluate students in a process of forming their competencies and skills with the objective of helping them in the learning process. In Brown’s words, “The key of such information is the delivery (by the teacher) and internalization (by the student) of appropriate feedback on performance, with an eye toward the future continuation (or formation) of learning” (p.6). This implies that after students develop any assessment activity, teachers are in charge of doing an accurate feedback that allows them to realize how their learning progress has been and how they can improve or reinforce it.

In the same way, Faustino, Kostina and Vergara (2013) state that formative assessment consists in giving learners feedback on their performance, for they can learn more efficiently. For many teachers, formative assessment could be an excellent option to be implemented in the classroom, since they have the opportunity to apply an integrative set of strategies to evaluate the performance of the students.

Regarding to summative assessment, it focuses on measuring or summarizing what students have learned. This kind of assessment can occur at the end of a course or unit of

instruction. Summative techniques in this classification of assessment involve evaluating the students through numbers without giving them valuable feedback. That prevents them to achieve a meaningful learning since when summative assessment is applied the goal is to determine to what degree students have mastered what has been taught. Examples of this assessment are final exams in a course and general proficiency exams (Brown, 2004).

**Traditional and alternative assessment.** According to Brawley (2009), traditional assessment refers to “a paper and pencil based test used to determine what students know and can recall” (p.2). Multiple-choice tests, true/ false tests, short answers and essays are used as traditional assessment tools (Dikli, 2003). Here, teachers play the most important role, results are more valuable than the learning process itself, and the different learning skills are assessed in an isolated way (Han, 2005).

As a different perspective to this kind of procedure, alternative assessment appears. Hamayan (1995) defines it as “the procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom” (as cited in Tannenbaum, 1996, p.2). To put it another way, it refers to practical and meaningful activities related to real contexts where students learn. Likewise, Hancock (1994) also defines this term as “an ongoing process involving the student and the teacher in making judgements about the student’s progress in language using non-conventional strategies” (p.3). When alternative assessment is applied, students are the center of the teaching and learning process, the learning skills are assessed integrally and it is more valuable the learning process than the learning results (Han, 2005).



Alternative assessment can be considered the opposite of the traditional one because it is more realistic and more appropriate to evaluate the capabilities of students not as something mechanical but as something interesting and enriching that lets them get engaged with a productive learning. To sum up, the main objective of alternative assessment is to “gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real-life tasks in a particular domain” (Huerta and Macias, 1995, as cited in Tannenbaum, 1996, p. 2). That is, to assess students as a whole throughout authentic materials and useful learning strategies, considering all their learning process (before, during and after).

In this way, after having a brief explanation of the concepts about assessment and its difference regarding evaluation and testing, it is necessary to broaden what assessment involves and the principles that teachers must consider in order to apply it to their classes.

### **Principles of language assessment**

According to Brown (2004) principles of language assessment such as practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback should be applied in language instruction.

Language teachers should know and incorporate them to their teaching-learning processes. Each of them are described below.

**Practicality.** To create a practical assessment, teachers must take into account that it is affordable for students in terms of money and time, it must be designed to be finished in prudent time, not so short, neither long. Moreover, teachers should find effortless to manage any kind of assessment, the same as taking no much time to score it.

**Reliability.** Assessment is reliable if after its application in two different moments, it is possible to have similar results, therefore the items or tasks, as well as the instructions contained

in it are accurate and coherent. It is said that the reliability of assessment could be affected by certain elements or circumstances, for instance, situations related to the student physical or psychological conditions (illness, motivation, anxiety); also, conditions related to the space and place where students are assessed, misunderstanding in the instructions of any assessment activity, among others which could hamper students' performance and in consequence, the reliability of assessment.

**Validity.** It is considered the most essential principle in language assessment, it has to do with designing assessments that let evaluate the learners' abilities properly by employing content related to what was taught; that is to say, if a teacher is going to assess writing skill then, the assessment task should be planned to accomplish that purpose. In order to be assessment valid, teachers must consider the students' language level, content to be assessed, learning capabilities, and context promoting assessment as a fair and meaningful tool for improving learning.

**Authenticity.** Creating authentic assessment entails presenting the tasks in a more contextualized way; for instance, before making a question about any topic, teachers could give students an introduction that let them have more elements to understand what is the question about. Moreover, it is important to provide meaningful topics combined with elements from their local context representing real-world tasks.

**Washback.** It refers to the effect that assessment could produce in the learning and teaching process. Beneficial washback can be provided through a number or a letter grade, which must be accompanied by constructive comments that enable learners to realize their performance during the assessment but also motivate them to continue improving. Furthermore, it is

significant that learners can talk to teachers about the feedback they were given, so they can solve doubts and have a better idea of their assessment outcomes.

### **Classroom Assessment**

Classroom assessment refers to the activities and resources that teachers employ to know and evaluate the performance of their students. McMillan (2003, as cited in López and Bernal, 2009, p.57) extends this conception when he defines assessment as “a wide variety of strategies employed by teachers to get feedback from students about how they are experiencing the learning process”. Faustino, Kostina and Vergara (2013) also define classroom assessment as a process to collect, analyze, interpret and report information in order to improve student’s learning. In the context of teaching, it is essential to understand these definitions since they help teachers to manage and apply the adequate value that assessment has in a classroom.

### **Assessment Literacy**

Since the purpose of this study is to explore how literate teachers are in language assessment, firstly, it is important to know what assessment literacy means in a general perspective. To that end, Giraldo (2018), supported by the American Federation of Teachers in 1990, defines the term as the capacity that teachers should have to choose, design, and evaluate assessment activities in order to achieve positive effects on learning, teaching and schools, and at the same time, to know when these have been used inadequately and how its results are communicated and received by their stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators).

Having this in mind and to establish a more accurate definition, according to Brookhart (2011, as cited in Giraldo, 2018) assessment literacy deals with knowledge regarding to how students learn in a specific subject establishing a connection between curriculum, instruction,

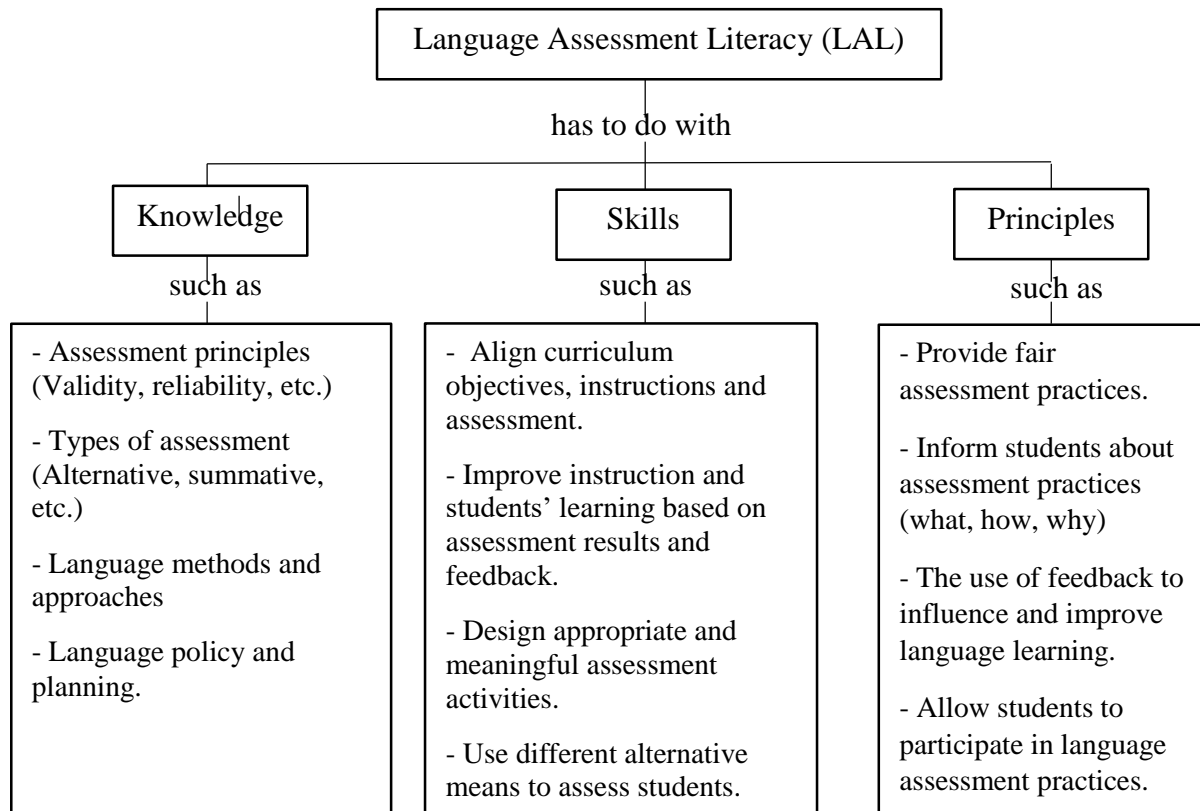
design, application and correct use of feedback to improve students' learning and teaching practices.

### **Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)**

Although assessment literacy and LAL concepts have similarities, the language component is the one that establishes a remarkable difference between them. This key element denotes that LAL definition goes beyond knowing, creating and applying assessment activities and how teachers and students deal with (Giraldo, 2018).

In LAL, it is necessary that teachers be aware of applying not only what it is known as assessment literacy, but also fundamental factors which are inherent features to the learning of a foreign language and that consequently have to do with the linguistic domain regarding knowledge, use and language pedagogy (Brookhart, 2001 and Popham, 2009, as cited in Giraldo 2018), such as, management of language acquisition and learning theories, accurately knowledge and application of language teaching approaches, types and principles of language assessment (Inbar-Lourie's 2013, as cited in Giraldo 2018), among others, which are relevant in order that teachers can be considered language assessment literate.

In that way, LAL entails that all those factors are contained in three main components: knowledge, skills and principles which language teachers should master in order to contextualize, plane, execute, evaluate, and interpret language assessment (Fulcher, 2012, as cited in Giraldo and Murcia, 2018). The scheme below explains in a more accurate way what here is stated.



**Figure 2.** Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) - (Adapted from Giraldo, 2018, pp. 187-190)

Figure 2 shows the different aspects that are immersed in knowledge, skills and principles which define LAL. Concerning knowledge, teachers should have clear theoretical concepts over language assessment, what these concepts are about and how they work in their teaching practices. Regarding skills, teachers must put their theoretical knowledge into real practice, being able to design and apply adequate assessment activities to improve and reinforce students' learning. Last but not least, principles are included as an element that has to do with ethical and fair issues in language assessment, its application will allow to contribute positively to the students' learning process.

As it can be seen, being literate in language assessment involves the union of several factors that assist to carry out a good and ideal application of assessment, which makes to reflect that teachers must not conceive assessment just as a measurable concept, instead, it must be considered as a useful tool that builds and benefits the learning of students and their teaching practices. In that sense, to be language assessment literate implies to possess theoretical and practical knowledge about assessment, consider students as a fundamental part of the process, be aware of their needs based on the context or settings, make a meaningful use of a variety of resources, strategies and techniques that foster assessment for learning. This will enable to reformulate and improve the way how teachers are achieving their teaching goals, and how students are developing their learning process in such a way that this becomes an enriching and motivating experience for them.

### **Background Studies on Assessment**

In this section, three studies on assessment carried out at national and international levels are going to be presented in order to support and better understand the relevance of knowing how literate English teachers should be in language assessment.

The first study was carried out by López and Bernal in 2009 and it analyzed the perceptions that English language teachers from different Colombian institutions (primary schools, secondary, university and technical institutions or language institutions) had about classroom assessment and how they were using language assessment in the classroom. For this study, they used a qualitative online survey to obtain the teachers' perspectives, experiences and concerns about language assessment. This survey showed that most of the teachers (pre-service or in- service) did not have training in language assessment. They used it to give just a grade or to make judgements without promoting meaningful learning in their students; therefore, they

demonstrated to have a more negative view of language assessment. On the other hand, just few teachers had had at least a course in assessment or had taken a language assessment training, so they had a more positive view of assessment.

This study is useful for this research since it reveals the lack of knowledge Colombian language teachers have about assessment, and it reflects the necessity of carrying out more studies about this topic with the purpose of raising awareness and taking action to improve the way how language teachers assess their students. Consequently, this study could make a useful contribution to improve language assessment practices.

The second study carried out by Muñoz, Palacio and Escobar in a private university in Colombia in 2012, tried to answer two research questions: first, what were the language center (LC) teachers' current beliefs about the LC oral and writing assessment systems, specifically? and second, did these beliefs match the assessment practices promoted by the LC? In order to develop this study, the researchers worked with sixty-two teachers (thirty female teachers and thirty-two male teachers) using surveys, interviews, and a written report of experiences to collect the information. As a result, researchers found that teachers considered assessment as a useful practice for improvement, but there was a lack of ability to put assessment into practice to improve the objectives, furthermore there was a tendency to use traditional assessment techniques in the classroom.

This study is relevant for this research because it shows that having a positive outlook of assessment is not enough, it is necessary to know more about it, how to apply it in actual contexts, how to make it meaningful for students and how to make teachers apply assessment principles consciously in a class; for that reason, it could be said that assessment literacy needs to

be implemented in the language teaching and learning field. This concept needs to be put into practice, and therefore, it needs to be studied and analyzed more to understand its implications and relevance in language education.

The last study carried out by Jannati in 2015 examined assessment-related perceptions and practices of ELT teachers from different language institutions in Iran, through the following research questions: How did high- and low-experienced ELT teachers perceive assessment and various assessment-related aspects of language programs? And to what extent ELT teachers' language assessment literacy was reflected in their practices? The study was developed with eighteen participants, four male and fourteen female EFL instructors who had different educational status and levels of experience. The participants were divided into groups according to the teaching experience (low, mid, high). A semi-structured interview was conducted and the interviews were recorded to be transcribed and analyzed later through content analysis to perceive recurring themes. As a result, the study indicated that teachers were informed about some basic concepts and terminologies related to assessment; likewise, it showed that for most of the participants their teaching experience seemed to make no significant difference in their assessment perception; and finally, despite teachers possessed a theoretical knowledge in assessment, it was not reflected on their classes, which meant they could not be considered language assessment literate.

The previous study is relevant for this research because it allows to realize about some visible difficulties when assessment is put into practice in the classroom. In other words, becoming assessment literate is not only knowing the theoretical part but also being able to use it in real environments with real life activities and tasks; being literate in language assessment implies that teachers have theoretical and practical knowledge.



In this regard, the literature review about assessment has been mentioned, highlighting its most fundamental aspects that are an essential basis to identify the literacy of secondary language teachers in language assessment, and in the same way, this chapter ends with short descriptions about studies that support this research. The next chapter presents the research methodology which is required to conduct this study.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Methodology**

In order to carry out the development of the research problem described at the beginning of this document, it is necessary to apply a procedure that allows the researchers to find the possible answers for the outlined objectives and purposes of this study. Considering this, it is pertinent to indicate and state all the aspects that are going to be used in the process and that make part of the research method which has been chosen according to what this study proposes. Thus, the parts of the method such as the research design, the sample and setting, the procedure, the data analysis and the ethical issues involved in this research are going to be described and explained below.

#### **Research Design**

Throughout this section, the research paradigm, the research method and the research techniques are going to be described as the fundamental elements of the research design.

##### **Research paradigm.**

Bearing in mind that the research problem of this paper aims at describing how literate English teachers are regarding assessment, as it has been named in the first chapter, this study follows a qualitative research type; consequently, the model of action that this research is going to be framed in, is the post-positivistic paradigm.

The qualitative approach is the one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on perspectives such as the multiple meanings of individual experiences and meanings socially and historically constructed in order to develop a theory or pattern (Creswell,

2003). In this vein and supporting what this approach states, the post-positivistic paradigm generates assumptions through inductive reasoning, that is to say, this paradigm pretends to establish general conclusions from particular facts or experiences trying to understand why situations, people or groups of people operate or behave in the manner that they do. Here, there is a place for the voice and role of the researcher and participants allowing the development of the investigation occurs in communities and in people's daily lives. Currently, studies based on this paradigm occur in small groups and the main intent is to search for meanings in specific cultural and social contexts (McGregor and Murnane, 2010).

Considering the information above, the qualitative research and the post-positivistic paradigm have been selected for this study since this investigation will describe how assessment is developed in a real context with English teachers. In the same way, and following the principles of qualitative research and the post-positivistic paradigm stated before, it will be possible to have a complete, detailed and accurate description and information about what this study has stated in its objectives.

### **Research method.**

The selected method for this investigation is the case study which is defined as a qualitative method in which the researcher explores a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals in depth; a case study is constrained by time and activity, and researchers collect information in detail, using a variety of data collection procedures over a certain period of time (Stake, 1995, as cited in Creswell, 2003, p.15).

This type of method is the most suitable one for this study because it implies the direct participation of English teachers in a real context which will allow to find out the level of literacy that the participants have regarding language assessment.

### **Research techniques.**

The techniques to be applied on this research are semi-structured interview and observation. On the one hand, a semi-structured interview is a combination of an unstructured interview and a structured interview; the former is essentially wide-open and left to the interviewer to determine its direction; here, the interviewee finds general beginning questions based upon the focus of the study and not every participant may be asked the same questions (Houser, 2015); the latter is a set of open-ended questions that cannot be answered in a yes-no format, this is planned and every participant is asked the same set of questions which is predetermined, but the interview can explore areas in more detail if it is necessary (Creswell, 2012, as cited in Houser, 2015, p. 94).

The semi-structured interview has been selected for this research because it allows to have complete and accurate information about the core problem to be studied and analyzed. It is a useful tool to diagnose and interpret all the aspects involved in the way English teachers, from public and private high schools in Pasto, assess their students.

On the other hand, the observation is a direct and careful study of a particular event through naked eye to collect real information about a problematic situation (Farooq, 2013). Observation allows to realize behaviors, knowledge of the context and specific incidents that emerge of the studied situation (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). According to Creswell (2014), observation could be done in a single, divided page; one side to take descriptive notes (portraits

of the participants, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, or activities); and on the other side, to take reflective notes, where the researcher can write personal ideas or impressions and add some relevant information related to the time, place and date where the observation takes place.

This technique is selected for this study because it allows the researchers to have first-hand information, describing the real context and the way how a teacher is applying language assessment with a group of students, and at the same time, this will allow to realize how teachers manage and develop an assessment activity.

The semi-structured interview and the observation techniques could be a very useful combination, since both will provide well supported data that will help to determine and identify what is required for the main goal of this study.

### **Sample and Setting**

Having known the main aspects of the research design of this study, it is vital to know the type and the principal characteristics of the sample and setting that are involved in this investigation.

#### **Sample.**

The sample is constituted by six high-school teachers from two public high-schools and one private high-school. They give instruction from 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade to students between 11 to 17 years of age.

#### **Setting.**

This study will be developed in three high-schools from Pasto, Nariño: one of them is a private high-school and the other two are public high-schools. These are located in the urban area

of the city and attend students from pre-school, basic and middle education. Here, it is worth mentioning that the private institution is significantly different from the public ones; the former is mainly characterized by having small groups of students, better class conditions, appropriate time to develop English classes (usually 4 hours per week), and the teaching and learning processes can be developed with a certain level of autonomy; on the other hand, the latter are characterized by having large classes, limited class materials and resources, limited time to develop English classes (usually 2 hours per week), basic class conditions, and the processes of teaching and learning are carried out under the national educational system policies. All these characteristics influence the application of assessment in English classes since each one of them can facilitate or make difficult the way how teachers assess students.

### **Procedure**

In order to collect the needed information for the development of this study, first, permission will be formally requested through the presentation of a letter to the principal to carry out the investigation; then, an informed consent letter will be presented to the participants (the principal and teachers) explaining the purpose of this study and requesting their official permission to use the information they will provide for the purpose of the study; after that, the semi-structured interview will be applied and given to the six English language teachers. The semi-structured interview will have the same questions and format for all of them, and it will be developed in three days. Each teacher will have one day to complete it. After that, the collected data will be analyzed and considering that information, which will be taken into account to develop the next technique; the observations will be applied in three different days as well, one day for every two teachers. The observations will take place when the teachers are developing any assessment activity during a class in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade where language assessment could be

more evident since students are expected to have a higher English level compared to lower grades students. All the observation formats contain the same statements and characteristics and they are designed to compare the answers of the semi-structured interviews with the real assessment practices teachers carry out. Then, the information obtained will be analyzed, and a written and oral report will be made. Consequently, the information about knowledge, weaknesses and strengths teachers have regarding assessment and its application will be presented in groups. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations obtained from the study will be provided. These reports will be presented to the principals and English teachers from the different educational institutions; and lastly, in an oral and written way, all of them will receive a personal appreciation for their valuable participation in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

After getting the information that will be collected through the semi-structured interviews and observations, the data analysis of this study will be developed.

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and observations will be analyzed following some steps proposed by Creswell (2012); so as reported by this author, first, the information will be organized and prepared by transcribing the interviews and observations, each one in different files, these transcriptions will allow to identify the most important ideas, differences, similarities, common patterns and special characteristics that English teachers present regarding language assessment.

Second, the whole transcribed data will be read in order to have a general sense of it, and also to reflect on its meaning according to the ideas of the participants with the purpose of coding the data. This process comprises to create categories for both the interview and the

observation data, which will be labelled with a term that represents each category. The categorization will be based on the literature review and on the research problem of this study. It is important to say that the analysis will allow to have categories but also subcategories of information, for instance, as a category could be assessment and the subcategory could be the types of assessment that the teacher uses in the classroom; another could be the application of assessment principles and the subcategories could be reliability, practicality, washback, validity and authenticity. These will be organized in a table to make them more comprehensible in the investigation.

The next step is to make a description of the setting, people or categories for analysis, the description will contain detailed information about these aspects, taking into account the coding process. After that, the descriptions and categories will be presented in qualitative narrative, in order to report the findings of the analysis.

Finally, the interpretation of the findings will proceed in order to give them meaning; in this way, the findings will be reported based on the problem statement of this study. This interpretation will be made in an objective way, adapting it to the conditions and necessities of the research and it will be explained with graphics or tables to make its comprehension easier. Furthermore, a written report including and considering both participants and researches' views and perspectives will be presented.

### **Ethical Issues**

It is well-known that it is really important for the researchers to keep in mind ethical issues in any investigation in order to avoid problems or displeasures among people or institutions. For that reason, this study is going to take into consideration the following aspects:



**Copyright.** It is going to be valued and respected other authors' ideas or creations that researchers took to support some ideas in our study.

**Permissions.** To present oral and written permission to the principal, teachers and students to work in the institutions and in the classrooms.

**Voluntary participation.** No one is going to be forced to participate in this study, instead, people are going to be motivated to participate, telling them the benefits of being part of a research study, and the advantages that this study could represent for the institution, teachers and students alike.

**Avoiding personal, physical and mental damage.** The main objective of this research is to contribute to describe how literate language teachers are in assessment which support future studies to improve the way how they assess students, this could be a valuable argument that will let participants trust the study, and thus, they will feel comfortable during this process.

**Anonymity.** When the results of this study are revealed, the participants' identities will be kept in anonymity, if they require to.

**Reciprocity.** The results of the study are going to be presented to the participants, and it will be done in an oral and written way.

**Thanking participants.** At the end of the study participants will receive a personal appreciation also orally and in writing, for their interest, patience, and collaboration with the study.

In short, in this chapter all the elements of the research methodology have been described in detail pointing out aspects such as, the type of research, research techniques, population, sample, procedure, validation criteria, data analysis and ethical issues to conduct this study.

## Conclusions

After having contemplated all the components that were described and stated for the goal and application of this study, the general conclusions as expected outcomes are going to be mentioned as follows.

Considering the important and challenging work that secondary language teachers carry out in the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language in the current educational context in Colombia, it would be very valuable for the language research field to develop more and continuous research studies focused on the role that educators have as English teachers and how this influences the assessment application in classes. Such researches could make useful contributions to improve students' learning and teaching practices.

On the other hand, Language Assessment Literacy is a broad concept that requires more attention from teachers; it shows its relevance in the language teaching field and its knowledge and correct application in the current educational context is necessary. It is a term that language teachers in public and private high-schools should be familiarized with and be aware of its significant contribution for the academic processes.

Moreover, it is fundamental that schools and high-schools teachers be supported by the national government through clear, adequate and fair educational policies that allow them to receive periodical and updated preparation in the teaching of English, and mainly in the assessment of students. This professional development could be provided by means of workshops, seminars, conferences and training courses which must be carried out based on the learning needs of students and clearly, on the teachers' practices.

Finally, designing a research project in this field has given us the opportunity to have a better understanding of our role as future language teachers, and specifically, how important

assessment courses are during our teacher training, since some of the assessment practices that educators or teachers apply in their current context can portray those ones which they were assessed with.

However, there is always a necessity to adapt the teaching and assessment practices to changes and challenges that the educational context faces every day, which is a strong reason for teachers to keep on ongoing preparation and learning regarding assessment and other issues that have to do with the teaching of English.

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**Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview**

University of Nariño  
Linguistics and Languages Department  
English and French Program

The following questions have been designed to know assessment in a broad way; the knowledge and understanding about the most important aspects of assessment considering concepts, principles, classification and the relevance this process has in the development of your English classes.

- a) In your opinion, what is your definition for assessment?
- b) What is good language assessment for you?
- c) Could you tell us what the characteristics of assessment are?
- d) Do you think assessment is based on some principles? Can you think of some of them?
- f) Can you mention some types of assessment you use with your students?
- g) When do you assess your students?
- h) What type of assessment do you frequently apply in your English classes?
- i) What are the criteria that you include or consider to plan your assessment procedures?
- j) Do you think students' scores represent what they have learned?
- k) Does assessment impact the way students study and do assignments? Yes/No - Why?
- l) Currently, do you think English teachers need to have more knowledge about language assessment? Yes/No - Why?

## Appendix B: Observation Format

University of Nariño

Linguistics and Languages Department

English and French Program

The objective of this instrument will be to obtain information through direct observation in order to find out how literate secondary language teachers are in language assessment during the English classes and what concepts, strategies, techniques, and materials they incorporate in each one of the activities that they use to assess students.

**Instructions:** The following observation format must be completed as objectively as possible, the observers must be discrete in order to avoid any type of interruption or discomfort during the class, and they must take clear notes as required in the format. On the additional comments section, it is admitted to report aspects or situations that the observers consider relevant for the purpose of the investigation in the case that they are not specified in this format.

<b>Observation Format</b>	
<b>Subject</b>	English
<b>Teacher's name</b>	
<b>Work experience</b>	
<b>Level and group</b>	
<b>High school</b>	
<b>Application's date</b>	

<b>Parts of the class</b>	<b>Assessment Categories</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Beginning of the class</b>	The teacher applies assessment activities during all his/her classes.						
	The planning and organization of assessment activities applied in class is evident.						
	The teacher explains assessment strategies before using them.						
	It is easy for students to understand and do the activities.						
	The time for students is adequate to do the assessment activity.						

<b>Middle of the class</b>	The teacher uses different types of assessment during his/her classes.						
	The teacher uses authentic materials to assess his/her students.						
	The assessment activities that teacher applies involve group work, oral presentations, reports of activities, or any other similar tasks.						
	The teacher applies some type of alternative assessment such as self-assessment, portfolios, peer-assessment, etc.						
	There is some difficulty when the teacher develops assessment during the class.						

	The activities are planned according to the objectives that the teacher wants to achieve.						
	The activities are planned according to the topics learned in classes.						
	Assessment activities were planned according to the students' level.						
<b>End of the Class</b>	The teacher gives students feedback after an assessment activity.						
	The applied assessment activities are meaningful and interesting for the students.						
	Assessment activities are contextualized to the real-world.						

	<p>It is possible to evidence some inconsistency in the grades of students after doing an assessment activity.</p>						
	<p>The language assessment principles are evident in the assessment activities. (practicality, authenticity, washback, reliability, validity).</p>						
<p><b>General Conclusion</b></p>							

**Additional comments**

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