



# Something Chaotic: assessing English learners from the point of view of complexity

*Algo Caótico: evaluando a estudiantes de inglés  
desde el punto de vista de la complejidad*

Juan David Grisales

Maestrando en Mediación Pedagógica en el Aprendizaje del Inglés-UNAD.



## ABSTRACT

The following article presents the importance of assessment, its impact on English language learning, and its complexity after applying an English practical workshop with a group of students from UNAD university, mediated by a virtual learning environment. For this purpose, it was necessary to research and analyze some conceptual and theoretical foundations that involve assessment from the point of view of complexity. In this sense, the application of the workshop is described as chaotic from the beginning until its last stage, where the assessment strategies emerged leaving aside that preliminary chaos. The information obtained from this pedagogical experience demonstrates that teachers must have a deeper view about assessing, about how to assess students and about how assessment impacts their lives.

### KEYWORDS:

assessment,  
learning,  
complexity,  
evaluation  
rubrics,  
pedagogical  
strategies.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta la importancia de la evaluación, su impacto en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés y su complejidad luego de aplicar un taller práctico de inglés con un grupo de estudiantes de la Universidad UNAD, mediado por un entorno virtual de aprendizaje. Para ello fue necesario investigar y analizar algunos fundamentos conceptuales y teóricos que implica la evaluación desde el punto de vista de la complejidad. La aplicación del taller se describe desde el inicio, en un entorno caótico, hasta su última etapa, donde surgen las estrategias de evaluación dejando de lado ese caos preliminar. Se concluye que los profesores deben tener una visión más profunda sobre la evaluación, sobre cómo evaluar a sus estudiantes y sobre cómo la evaluación afecta sus vidas.

### PALABRAS CLAVE:

evaluación,  
aprendizaje,  
complejidad,  
rúbricas de  
evaluación,  
estrategias  
pedagógicas.

## INTRODUCTION

The word “assessment” is now used in many speeches, and education is not resilient to this phenomenon. Nonetheless, Santos (2017) defined assessment as “evaluation is not just a mechanical procedure that leads to a qualification but, on the contrary, contains ethical dimensions of a nature not negligible” (p.76). This definition suggests that there is a misconception about its application; that what is currently encouraged in schools is the assessment of mental learning by an instrument known as a test or exam, focusing assessment on a cruel procedure done by teachers ( Santos , 2017 ) This remarkable instrument is grounded on behaviorism outlooks, which always expects a unique response to a learned behavior; it seems to be that the creativity and ingenuity of teachers and students are falling asleep. Furthermore, it is also demonstrated that the affective capacity, the culture, as well as the principles and values of life are numbed.

In contrast to this positivist interpretation of evaluation in teaching and learning, different proposals such as the ones made by Santos (2017) and Alvarez (2001) (as cited in Hernandez,2008) showed that there are other ways to assess very differently from those which have been historically recognized in the educational field. Thus, assessment does not pertain to a production line process, it is a complex process in which many factors interact within the curriculum, it is a challenge for the teacher to practice actively, and in new ways of teaching that enable and invite a different way of learning and its result must be relevant and meaningful for learners. Therefore, this article looks for demonstrating the importance of assessment, its impact, and complexity after having a pedagogical experience in a virtual environment. Then, for achieving this, it is necessary to present some assessment backgrounds and theoretical foundations.

## 1. ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND

Since it has been conceptualized and interpreted with various meanings throughout history, the term “assessment” has been vague. The assessment backgrounds were related to examinations, which were collected by oral interviews performed by the supporter in front of a court and front of the public. In the XVIII century, these examinations began to be developed and applied in written form (Escudero, 2003). Later, Nicolas and Ferrand (2002) presented to Alfred Binet (1857-1911), a French pedagogue and psychologist, who contributed to both psychometry and education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by developing a measure for predicting school success. This instrument was designed to determine whether the children had special attention needs at school.

These works marked the base of the successive development of the era of “testing” when a multitude of standardized tests was designed to measure all kinds of school skills, which were intended to be used with large groups of students. Such was the acceptance of these standardized applications that in later years, they were introduced in academic settings, and objective tests were designed by the students themselves. Properly during the fifties with the research developed by Ralph W. Tyler (Wraga, 2017) on curriculum that the term of educational evaluation was coined with a methodical and behaviorist vision, in which the evaluation was placed in the foreground before measurement. Wraga (2017) highlighted “Its goal was to see how far the previously set learning objectives, which are specified in terms of behavior, can mark the student’s individual growth within a socializing process”.

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS:

### 2.1 From the concept:

The first issue with the term assessment is that everyone refers to it, but each one conceptualizes and interprets it with a different meaning. To clarify this semantic confusion, this article will present some of the definitions that are closer to contemporary teaching practice, or that describe it more clearly. Morin (2000, as cited in Hernandez, 2008) stated that “in today’s world, every concept and knowledge need to be reflected, recognized and problematized”. Then, a traditional meaning suggests that assessment is the estimate judgment of any activity or human situation. In this sense, every person performs daily evaluations on their activities or on the various situations in which they are involved. Santos (2017) conceptualized it as a flexible, dynamic, continuous, cooperative, and systematic process with a clear educational purpose and a support to the learning process and personal development.

Consequently, Alvarez (2000, as cited in Hernandez, 2008) argued that “assessment represents learning when there is a formative assessment process”. Additionally, he considered that this term is complex, and a wide range of interpretations can be found according to different interests and expectations, depending on who the interpreters are and who makes use of it. In this sense, Santos (2017) defined assessment as “a formative process that encloses a high level of complexity which reduces it as well as everyone considers it as a simple process of grading” (p. 73).

Moreover, House (1985, cited in Hernandez, 2008) presented his point of view “Assessment could be right or wrong, precise or imprecise, fair or unfair, useful or useless, efficient or inefficient”. depending on the circumstances of its application and the corresponding validity of its estimates, and grounds. On

the other hand, Conrad (2018) pointed out that assessment makes part of the curriculum when it is based on dialogue and when that dialogue has its focus on the expansion of the individual’s understanding of their performance and aspirations, then the assessment becomes part of the curriculum.

Notwithstanding, assessment is a term that implies many definitions and point of views, it also applies to multiple situations or moments of the process of being assessing. For example, there are internal evaluation, self-assessment; and external evaluation, peer assessment and co – assessment (Segers and Sluijsmans, 1999). Therefore, not only learners are assessed, but it is also mandatory to assess institutions and their curriculum to improve and innovate the pedagogical and learning experience (Santos, 2017). Likewise, alternative models of assessment are found formative, summative, criterial, democratic valuation, illuminative evaluation, case studies, improvement, process evaluation models.

### 2.2 From the theory:

In the 1970s, after a series of changes experienced in the world, a period of reflection and theoretical essays began in the face of evaluation needs with the aim to clarify the multidimensionality of the evaluation process. These theoretical reflections significantly broaden the conceptual and analytical reach of evaluation, which, combined with the rapid growth of program evaluation, will give rise to a new applied modality known as evaluative research (Wilbrink, 1997). Then, Cronbach (1988, cited in Garcia, 2008) associated assessment with decision making. Likewise, he suggested that assessment ought to include the study of the process grounded on student’s performance and attitudes and linked to what Anderson (2002) stated “learning and teaching must be an integral and reflective process”. It is understandable, that

assessment techniques cannot be limited to performance tests. Assessment must include techniques or instruments which promote a process of continuous reflective construction.

In concordance, Hernandez (2016) supported that rubric-based evaluation allows teachers to develop conceptual models that consider the interactions and challenges that student externalize in the classroom. As a result, a vision that encompasses the world that surrounds both the student, and the teacher must be directed to promote learning. In congruence with this outlook, Tobon (2019) detailed the fundamental elements of the rubric such as indicators, descriptors, levels, as well as the weighting in a rubric, and the column of observations to exercise feedback so that they can improve and highlight student achievement. In this manner, Luna - Nemecio (2019, as cited in Quezada and Cuenca, 2019) argued that assess through rubrics encourages complex thinking in students since it leads to learning skills to produce knowledge. The usefulness of complex thinking is a strategic piece to promote a dynamic and meaningful learning process.

### 3. EXPERIENCE

During the courses of *Pedagogical mediation in Language Learning* and *Assessment processes in language mediation and learning*, in the master's program in Pedagogical Mediation in English Learning, at the UNAD, it was established to teach some English language classes through workshops with a population from the university, to have the experience of teaching virtually and put in practice all the theory learned in those courses and the program. Thus, this experience departed from chaos product of the complexity of starting, having the chaos and complexity as the most attractive factors of this challenge, teachers did not know what to expect and how to start.

In consequence, teachers followed the guidelines of the courses' rubrics, they posted on the different forums their proposals of the activities and strategies to receive the corresponding tutor's feedback which was necessary to improve their workshop. For this, teachers read a lot and reflected on all pedagogical concerns that appeared in the previous stages. This process was developed step by step with a lot of patience, conviction, critical thinking, and innovative ideas. Hence, during the *Pedagogical mediation in Language Learning* course, a virtual portfolio was created as an innovative resource. This portfolio presented appealing pictures and content, the activities and strategies were posted on it. The portfolio was checked and improved collectively as all the activities of the course.

Meanwhile, during the *Assessment processes in language mediation and learning* course, the teachers developed complex thinking which was useful for reflecting on how to assess students effectively. Then, the way of assessing was reconsidered and improved regarding to present an integral assessment, which integrates students' and teachers' performance, being necessary to propose different ways of assessing through rubrics: A rubric that assessed the workshop and teacher's performance, another rubric for assessing students' performance, and a final rubric for teacher self-evaluation (Dochy et al, 1999). At the of the three workshop days, those rubrics were filled out by the participants.

The high level of complexity in assessment is evident during all the courses from this master's program due to the difficulty of the units, the way they are designed and how teachers assess them. Units are set into challenges from low to high level and teachers assess each challenge in a quantitative and qualitative way. The quantitative is displayed the performance using numbers and the

qualitative, which is the most meaningful, it is provided through feedback on the forums after participating or / and a paper delivery. This dynamic leads to a constant improvement and a self-reflection since an individual process that might occur in society, but the learner must check his or her progress individually (Santos, 2017).

At this point, it is evident that there have been many definitions and misconceptions

about assessment and its process during history. Current education has demonstrated that assessment is opposite to what it has been considered. By the way, Santos (2017) highlighted “Assessment is not used as a learning instrument for teaching but as a simple way of checking of the effort made by the learner”. Consequently, it makes it mandatory for teachers to understand how to assess students and how assessment impacts their lives.



## REFERENCES

- Anderson, N. (2008). Metacognition and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Learners* (Cambridge Language Teaching Library, pp. 99-109). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: <https://doi.org/bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/10.1017/CBO9780511497667.010>
- Conrad, D., & Openo, J. (2018). Assessment strategies for online learning: Engagement and authenticity. *Athabasca University Press. Chapter 7. Planning an Assessment and Evaluation Strategy—Authentically*. <https://bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1852746&lang=es&site=eds-live&scope=site>
- Dochy, F., Segers, M., & Sluijsmans, D. (1999). The use of self-, peer and Co-assessment in higher education: A review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 24(3), 331-350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079912331379935>
- García, Sergio. (2002). La Validez y la Confiabilidad en la Evaluación del Aprendizaje desde la Perspectiva Hermenéutica. *Revista de Pedagogía*, 23(67), 297-318. 19 de mayo de 2021, de [http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0798-97922002000200006&lng=es&tlng=es](http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0798-97922002000200006&lng=es&tlng=es).
- Hernández-Mosqueda, J. S., Tobón-Tobón, S., & Guerrero-Rosas, G. (2016). Hacia una evaluación integral del desempeño: las rúbricas socioformativas. *Ra Ximhai*, 12(6), 359-376. <http://revistas.unam.mx/index.php/rxm/article/view/71894/63423>
- Hernández Nodarse, M. (2008). Teoría de la Complejidad y aprendizaje: algunas consideraciones necesarias para la enseñanza y la evaluación. *Lecturas: Educación Física y Deportes*, 121 (27). <https://bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsdnp&AN=edsdnp.5604554ART&lang=es&site=eds-live&scope=site>

Nicolas, Serge y Ferrand, Ludovic. (2002). Alfred Binet and Higher Education. *History of psychology*. 5. 264-83. 10.1037/1093-4510.5.3.264. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/11141568\\_Alfred\\_Binet\\_and\\_Higher\\_Education](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/11141568_Alfred_Binet_and_Higher_Education)

Quezada Tobar, L. y Cuenca, J. (2019). *La Evaluación Socioformativa en el Siglo XXI*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337531681\\_La\\_Evaluacion\\_Socioformativa\\_en\\_el\\_Siglo\\_XXI](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337531681_La_Evaluacion_Socioformativa_en_el_Siglo_XXI)

Tobon, S. (2019). Elaboración de instrumentos de evaluación desde la socioformación. En L. G. Juárez-Hernández (Coord.), *Memorias del Cuarto Congreso Internacional de Evaluación (VALORA-2019)*. Congreso conducido por el Centro Universitario CIFE, Cuernavaca, México. <https://cife.edu.mx/recursos/2019/11/15/congreso-valora-2019/>

Wraga, W. (2017). Understanding the Tyler rationale: Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction in historical context. *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318089758\\_Understanding\\_the\\_Tyler\\_rationale\\_Basic\\_Principles\\_of\\_Curriculum\\_and\\_Instruction\\_in\\_historical\\_context](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318089758_Understanding_the_Tyler_rationale_Basic_Principles_of_Curriculum_and_Instruction_in_historical_context)

Wilbrink, B. (1997). Assessment in historical perspective. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. 23. 31-48. 10.1016/S0191-491X(97)00003-5. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248448108\\_Assessment\\_in\\_historical\\_perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248448108_Assessment_in_historical_perspective)

Santos Guerra, M. Á. (2017). *Dime cómo evalúas y te diré qué tipo de profesional y de persona eres*. <https://bibliotecavirtual.unad.edu.co/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbas&AN=edsbas.D0640CC0&lang=es&site=eds-live&scope=site>