Self-Assessment and Tutor Assessment in Online Language Learning Materials: InGenio FCE Online Course and Tester

Ana Sevilla-Pavón, Antonio Martínez-Sáez, and José Macario de Siqueira*

Abstract

This chapter addresses different modalities of assessment, provides an overview of the assessment processes of the basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) tested by the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) examination, and explores the ways in which the FCE Online Course and Tester –the resources provided through the InGenio CALL authoring shell, content manager and courseware delivery platform– contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment of those skills. These materials are flexible enough to be adapted to different degrees of learning autonomy, thus allowing students to assess their own progress while enabling their learning process to be monitored by a tutor or a teacher in those cases where the materials are used by them as a complement for their language lessons. Such is the case of some teachers at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV) who are already successfully making use of some of the materials published through InGenio as a way to include additional contents and monitor and assess their students' achievements and progress. One of the most important features concerning these online language learning materials is that they allow students to choose between two main modalities of assessment, one of them enabling them to supervise their own learning process; and the other one leading to the development of their autonomy and sense of responsibility while getting support from a tutor or teacher.

Keywords: modalities of assessment, FCE, online language learning, autonomy.

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1. Introduction

The importance of assessment is derived from both its influence in the way teachers and students address language teaching and learning and the changes it might introduce as far as methodologies, approaches and behaviour of all participants in the language learning process are concerned. Brown and Glasner (2003) consider assessment as one of the key aspects in education and define it as the "dynamic developmental process which develops and changes as the needs arise and as understanding of the process improves" (preface). The washback effect, defined by Messick (1996) as "the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning" (p. 241), is a frequent phenomenon which should also be taken into consideration when dealing with the process of assessment. It is usually found in the language classroom in the form of innovations and new ways of teaching in an attempt to foster students' motivation and the emergence of a greater variety of learning strategies. Teachers usually try to adopt new methodologies and implement new approaches to language teaching as an effort to adapt the contents and materials they develop to meet the students' individual and specific needs, goals, interests and expectations. In this particular case, not only do the students who learn and practice by using the FCE Online Course and who assess their knowledge through the FCE Online Tester try to attain the target language level, but they also aim at passing the official examination. Exam criteria were taken into consideration by the authors of these preparatory materials which were thus adapted to such demands and to the typologies of exercises comprised by the official examination. This fact could be seen as an example of how the washback effect has been present in the process of material design and development. A wide section of exercises included in the course and tester follow the typology, structure and level of the exam. Therefore, students are allowed to practice and assess their knowledge in accordance with the final exam criteria.

This chapter explores some of the key issues concerning the assessment process of skills tested by the Cambridge First Certificate in English Examination* and

*Further information available at Cambridge ESOL webpage: http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/general-english/fce.html

the ways in which the InGenio* online preparatory materials contribute to its effectiveness and efficiency in both self-assessment and tutor assessment, with a special focus on the two most recently developed learning materials within the CAMILLE Research Group** at the UPV: FCE Online Course and FCE Online Tester. InGenio is a content manager tool which allows users to develop preparatory materials and activities through a system based on templates. One of the main advantages of the materials created is their adaptability and flexibility. It allows students to have access to two different modalities of assessment and to two different learning options, thus enabling a wider range of students with different characteristics and needs to organise the way in which they intend to face the learning process in the most convenient way, for each of them, so as to obtain better results. Students' self-assessment is the first learning modality offered. It enables students to conduct their own learning process and to assess their own learning achievements in an independent, and autonomous way. Tutor assessment, the other modality provided by these materials, leads to the development of the students' autonomy and sense of responsibility over the learning process, while enabling students to get as much help and support as they need from a human tutor in order to both complete the different tasks and attain the target level of language.

2. The skills tested by the FCE examination

Assessment is a very important component of the learning process. Its importance mainly derives from the fact that it is capable of influencing the way teaching and learning are addressed. Assessment is likely to make teachers and learners, who are the main participants in the learning process, introduce changes in their methodologies, approaches, behaviour and learning strategies. These changes would be based on "the particular kind of knowledge or ability that a test is designed to measure" (Read, 2000, p. 95), that is, the construct, a

* InGenio is a free online content delivery and management platform with a number of language courses available. Among them are: Intermediate Online English, Valencià Interactiu – Grau Mitjà, and beginners and elementary courses for learners of Czech and Slovak. The system has been developed by the CAMILLE Research Group led by Dr. Ana Gimeno-Sanz (Department of Applied Linguistics – Universidad Politécnica de Valencia). See http://camilleweb.upv.es/camille for further information.

** CAMILLE stands for Computer Assisted Multimedia Interactive Language Learning Environment

concept which is closely linked to the process of content validity. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) define content validity as "any attempt to show that the content of a test is a representative sample from the domain that is to be tested" (p. 6). Buck (2001) considers that the essential condition for any test to be acceptable is that it measures the appropriate construct, this being the only possible way to ensure validity and usefulness of that assessment. In order to design the right test to measure the four main skills tested by FCE, i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking, it is important to know the micro-skills and strategies that the candidates need to put into practice in order to ascertain that they have the appropriate level, as well as the way to assess those skills.

When dealing with the assessment of the reading skills, several guidelines about teaching and curriculum planning, mentioned by authors such as Grabe (1991, 2008, p. 81), should be taken into consideration. Reading should be integrated together with other skills within content; the texts should be interesting and related to the candidates' education, hobbies and particular interests; the different reading sub-skills should be measured; silent reading should be fostered, and so should reading comprehension. Furthermore, the person in charge of the assessment should be able to accept different interpretations of the texts, organising skills and strategies systematically and taking into account the characteristics and objectives of each group.

According to Alderson (2000), the reading assessment guidelines also apply to the different levels of understanding to be assessed, which are "literal understanding of a text, an understanding of meanings that are not directly stated in text, or an understanding of the main implications of a text" (p. 7), as well as the distinction between what Gray (1960, in Alderson, 2000, p. 7) called reading "the lines", that is, understanding the literal meaning of a text, reading "between the lines" or inferring meanings, and reading "beyond the lines". This means making critical evaluations and judgements of a text. Because there are so many aspects to take into account when assessing reading, as Alderson (2000) points out, it is very important to find a way to measure reading accurately, considering to what extent the tests reflect and are based on previous research and literature referred not only to the process but also to the product. When trying to find the appropriate way to

measure reading comprehension, one of the main things to consider is what the relevant task characteristics are. These can be determined with the help of the following framework (Table 1), designed by Bachman and Palmer (1996).

Table 1. Framework of task characteristics

Adapted from Bachman and Palmer (1996).

Setting	Physical circumstances under which either language use or language testing takes place: • physical characteristics of the setting; • participants involved; • time of the task.
Rubric	Context for the task: Those characteristics that provide the structure for the task and constrain how language users or test takers are expected to respond to these tasks.
Input	Material contained in the task, which test takers need to process in some way, and to which they are expected to respond.
Expected response	Language use that is expected, given the way in which the rubric, or context, for the task is configured, and the particular input that is provided.
Relationship between input and response	• Reactivity: degree of reciprocity, or interaction involved. • Scope: amount and range of input that needs to be processed in order to respond. • Directness: extent to which the response can be made by using information in the input by itself, or whether the language user or test taker must also rely on information in the context or in his or her own real world knowledge..

As far as the use of computers for reading is concerned, it is advantageous for learners because of several features such as the instantaneous access it provides to many kinds of authentic and communicative reading materials through the Web, the capacity to add hypertexts in order to access other texts or useful links as well as additional explanations on vocabulary and grammar, the addition of multimedia files as a complement of the reading materials, and the capacity to control reading speed and other aspects of learning (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). In addition, the Web is a rich source of written materials that can contribute to both the improvement of reading skills to higher levels and the students' cultural competence (Taylor & Gitsaki, 2004). Nevertheless, there

is also a series of disadvantages associated with reading on the computer and on the Web. One such disadvantage is the fact that it might be uncomfortable, although this would probably not be an inconvenience if other kind of devices, such as iPads, or more recent developments in screen technology were used instead. Another inconvenience is the fact that it might be harder to find the appropriate texts or excerpts among the huge quantity of materials and information available. In addition, it might be hard to pick the materials with the appropriate level, both linguistically and socially. However, being aware of these drawbacks can help a teacher face them with ease so that a great quantity of useful materials can be used, integrated and adapted to the context of language learning (Dudeney, 2000).

The materials developed to be implemented through the InGenio online platform aim to offer resources to practice the four basic linguistic skills. Concerning reading, InGenio provides the authors with several exercise templates that allow them to create a varied range of activities for autonomous practice and self-assessment. Some of these templates are: reordering, matching, monitoring comprehension, multiple-choice questions (single selection with pull-down menu, single selection menu, and multiple selection), gap-filling exercises, reinforcing new vocabulary, vocabulary building, and word search puzzles. The contents included in the tasks and texts that are part of the exercises are not only devoted to practicing and assessing reading skills but also to helping students think critically and analytically and have a justified or well-founded opinion about some of the world's most important or interesting facts and events. Learners are also provided with more resources such as reference materials, additional explanations and hints, further reading, appropriate feedback according to the student's performance, automatic communication of results through progress reports, and printing-enabled screens.

As for writing, historically it tended to be considered more prestigious and elitist than speaking (Brown & Yule, 1983; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Gilmore, 2007). Nowadays, it is an essential tool of communication in the global community we are living in. Additionally, there has been a change in the role of writing as it has shifted from "conveying information" to "transforming knowledge to create new

knowledge" while helping to predict future professional and academic success. The importance of writing as a predictor might explain the great demand of valid and reliable ways to test writing ability (Weigle, 2009). According to Hamp-Lyons (1991), there are two main ways to assess writing: direct and indirect. The main characteristics of a "direct" test are as follows (Hamp-Lyons, 1991): candidates must write at least one piece of continuous text, they are given a set of instructions or "prompts" but have some freedom in their responses, each test is usually read by more than one trained rater, judgments are tied to a set of sample responses or rating scales, and these judgments are expressed as numbers. In addition, there are other important characteristics such as the limited time frame, generally between thirty minutes and two hours, and the fact that the topic is unknown to test takers in advance (Weigle, 2009, p. 59). The dimensions of tasks for direct writing assessment are specified in Table 2. As for the "indirect" tests of writing or "timed impromptu writing tests", they most often consist of multiple-choice tests of grammar and usage (Hamp-Lyons, 1991).

Table 2. Dimensions of tasks for direct writing assessment

Adapted from Purves, Söter, Takala, and Vähäpassi (1984, pp. 397-398), and Hale (1996), cited in Weigle (2009, p. 63).

Dimension	Examples
Subject matter	Self, family, school, technology, etc.
Stimulus	Text, multiple texts, graph, table
Genre	Essay, letter, informal letter, informal note, advertisement
Rhetorical task	Narration, description, exposition, argument
Pattern of exposition	Process, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, classification, definition
Cognitive demands	Reproduce facts/ideas, organise/reorganise information, apply/analyse/synthesise/evaluate
Specification of: • Audience • Role • Tone, style	• Self, teacher, classmates, general public • Self/detached observer, other/assumed persona • Formal, informal
Length	Less than ½ page, ½ to 1 page, 2-5 pages
Time allowed	Less than 30 minutes, 30-59 minutes, 1-2 hours
Prompt wording	Question vs. statement, implicit vs. explicit, amount of context provided
Choice of prompts	Choice vs. no choice
Transcription mode	Handwritten vs. word-processed
Scoring criteria	Primarily content and organisation; primarily linguistic accuracy; unspecified

As far as the process of test development is concerned, it occurs in three main stages: design, operationalisation and administration (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). These stages are followed by a very important procedure: scoring, which is used in making decisions and inferences about the performance of the exam takers and therefore must be accurate and derive from appropriate, theoretically-grounded and consistent rating scales and scoring rubrics (Weigle, 2009, p. 108). Writing assessment has overcome dramatic changes due to the impact of technology and increased global communication. In fact, the nature of writing itself has been affected by ICT "in terms of process, norms and standards" (Weigle, 2009, p. 231) and the emergence of scoring of writing by computer is picturing the future of computers as supplements of human raters, especially in the case of large-scale writing assessments such as FCE.

Creativity has a dominant role in the practice of writing, as well as in the practice of speaking. Concerning the InGenio FCE online materials, in the sections devoted to practicing writing and speaking, more freedom is given to students in order to allow them to write and speak about topics that concern them or that they find interesting and attractive. The tasks which are being designed fit the official FCE exam criteria, and try to present these training sections in a more innovative way through more open and reflective approaches. The students also have access to some useful recommendations in order to finally respect the limits fixed by the construct tested by the official exam. Moreover, course designers may need to take into account the type of texts that learners need to write and read in their L2, which could markedly differ from the texts that they write or read in their L1 (Ferguson, 2007). Open input without sound and open-input with sound are among the most useful InGenio templates when it comes to encouraging students "to analyse data and subsequently reason their answers" (Gimeno-Sanz, 2009a, p. 93) and write their own input in the form of rewriting, information transfer, short answers, etc.

As for listening, it is considered as the least understood of all skills (Alderson & Bachman, editors' preface, in Buck, 2001) in spite of being the most important one because of its potential influence in teaching methodologies. It is also difficult to measure at a technical level, and it is time-consuming

too, which may explain the frequent reluctance to test it. Nevertheless, it is essential to give listening assessment the importance it deserves, given that the consequent washback could influence teachers and make them aware of the fact that developing listening skills is crucial for students to be able to communicate in the target language. This is especially true in those contexts where the students' L2 is the vehicular language and therefore the main means of interaction. The following listening framework describes its two main components: language competence and strategic competence. Each competence implies different kinds of knowledge, as shown in Table 3 below, adapted from Buck (2001, p. 104).

Table 3. Framework for describing listening ability

Adapted from Buck (2001, p. 104).

Language competence	Knowledge about language that the listener brings to the listening situation. Includes fully automated procedural knowledge and controlled or conscious declarative knowledge: grammatical, discourse, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic knowledge.
Grammatical knowledge	Understanding short utterances on a literal semantic level. Includes phonology, stress, intonation, spoken vocabulary, spoken syntax.
Discourse knowledge	Understanding longer utterances or interactive discourse between two or more speakers. Includes knowledge of the discourse features (cohesion, foregrounding, rhetorical schemata and story grammars) and knowledge of the structure of unplanned discourse.
Pragmatic knowledge	Understanding the function or the elocutionary force of an utterance or longer text, and interpreting the intended meaning in terms of that. Includes understanding whether utterances are intended to convey ideas, manipulate, learn or are for creative expression, as well as understanding indirect speech acts and pragmatic implications.
Sociolinguistic knowledge	Understanding the language of particular sociocultural settings, and interpreting utterances in terms of the context of situation. Includes knowledge of appropriate linguistic forms and conventions characteristic of particular sociolinguistic groups, and the implications of their use, or non-use, such as slang, idiomatic expressions, dialects, cultural references, figures of speech, levels of formality and registers.

Strategic competence	Includes cognitive and metacognitive strategies, or executive processes, that fulfil the cognitive management function in listening. It is the ability to use language competence, and includes all the compensatory strategies used by second language listeners.
Cognitive strategies	Mental activities related to comprehending and storing input in working memory or long-term memory for later retrieval.
Comprehension processes	Associated with processing of linguistic and non-linguistic input.
Storing and memory processes	Associated with storing of linguistic and non-linguistic input in working memory or long-term memory.
Using and retrieval processes	Associated with accessing memory, to be ready for output.
Metacognitive strategies	Conscious or unconscious mental activities that perform an executive function in the management of cognitive strategies.
Assessing the situation	Taking stock of conditions surrounding a language task by assessing one's own knowledge, one's available internal and external resources and constraints of the situation before engaging in the task.
Monitoring	Determining the effectiveness of one's own or another's performance while engaged in a task.
Self-evaluating	Determining effectiveness of one's own or another's performance after engaging in the task.
Self-testing	Testing oneself to determine the effectiveness of one's own language use or the lack thereof.

Out of the three main approaches to assessing listening, that is, discrete-point, integrative and communicative, Buck (2001) considers the communicative approach, characterised by using the language "for the purpose of communication, in a particular situation and for a particular purpose" (p. 83), the most effective one. In this approach, the texts to be listened to are authentic and genuine. There is a well-defined goal and the examinees have to accomplish authentic tasks. The basic idea underlying communicative testing is that these tests emulate the use of language in the real world, which means that the construct to be assessed is richer and more realistic, in such a way that it "allows the examiner to make useful inferences about the examinee's communicative abilities" (Buck, 2001, p. 92). As for the use of technologies in assessing listening, Levy and Stockwell (2006) underline that they should

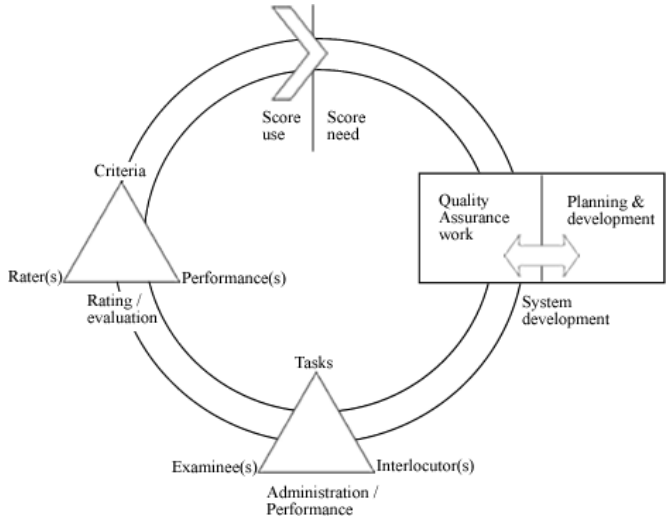
be used in such a way that they provide something extra that was not available through traditional teaching and assessment, in order to enhance learning. The success of multimedia tasks, according to Hoven (1999), depends on the way they are designed as far as individual differences among students, learning styles and preferred learning models are concerned.

The InGenio preparatory materials are not devoted uniquely to practicing through written channels and static texts, but to expand oral and communicative skills by introducing tasks and scenarios aimed at fostering real practice of oral skills. This is done through corpora of audio excerpts (listening) and voice recording systems (speaking) which can be uploaded onto the system for a tutor to assess and subsequently provide appropriate feedback. In the case of completely autonomous practice and assessment, students are provided with models so as to allow them to compare them with their own answers. In particular, concerning the listening skills, the InGenio content manager provides editors with video and audio templates as well as with the means to build up an abundant pool of images and audio and video files. Many of the templates used to practice and assess reading skills could also be used for the listening activities.

Finally, in relation to the assessment of speaking skills, numerous studies point out that this is one of the most complex and controversial aspects within second language teaching (Weir, O'Sullivan, & Horai, 2006). This is due to the difficulties encountered when trying to join the targets of the assessment and the appropriate tasks or instruments that assessment requires (Luoma, 2009). Moreover, speaking is considered the hardest skill to be taught and tested through computers, which might explain the "lack of representativeness" of studies focusing on speaking (Levy & Stockwell, 2006, p. 181). This makes the integration of assessment of communicative speaking into CALL materials a true challenge. Luoma (2009) conceives speaking assessment as a cycle in which the participants involved are the examinees, the interlocutors, the examiners, and the rating/marking criteria. The following illustration (Figure 1), adapted from Luoma (2009, p. 5), outlines the oral assessment activity cycle.

Figure 1. Oral assessment activity cycle

Adapted from Luoma (2009, p. 5).



As this graph shows, the cycle starts when the necessity of speaking assessment is perceived; planning and development stages follow, resulting in the definition of the construct. Next, the criteria are determined as well as the way in which the exam is to be administered. Assessment then takes place by means of two interaction processes: firstly, exam administration and candidates' performance in interactions (among the candidates and/or the examiner) in which they show their oral production skills; and secondly, a rating process in which the examiners apply the assessment criteria to the candidates' performance in order to obtain a grade for each of the candidates.

Prior to assessing speaking, the type of speech to be assessed has to be determined: planned or not, formal or informal, etc., as there might be substantial changes in vocabulary choices, grammar constructions or pronunciation depending on the type of discourse (Luoma, 2009). Another factor that could influence the type of speech acts is the social/situational context, which can be determined by using Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING model when planning and describing the construct (Table 4).

Table 4. SPEAKING Model

Adapted from Hymes (1974).

Setting/Scene	"Setting refers to the time and place of a speech act and, in general, to the physical circumstances" (Hymes, 1974, p. 55). Scene is the "psychological setting" or "cultural definition" of a scene, including characteristics such as range of formality and sense of play or seriousness (Hymes, 1974, pp. 55-56).
Participants	Speaker and audience. Linguists will make distinctions within these categories; for example, the audience can be distinguished as addressees and other hearers (Hymes, 1974, pp. 54-56).
Ends	Purposes, goals, and outcomes (Hymes, 1974, pp. 56-57).
Act Sequence	Form and order of the event.
Key	Cues that establish the "tone, manner, or spirit" of the speech act (Hymes, 1974, p. 57).
Instrumentalities	Forms and styles of speech (Hymes, 1974, pp. 58-60).
Norms	Social rules governing the event and the participants' actions and reaction.
Genre	The kind of speech act or event.

Context is the first element Hymes (1974) mentions. It concerns all the aspects and elements that are present at the moment of interaction, i.e., "the linguistic, physic, psychological and social dimensions of the language that is being used" (Luoma, 2009, p. 30). Context also refers to the concrete aspects of the situation in which the interaction takes place, such as the place or the interlocutors' previous experiences of use, what is said and the way it is said in different situations. The implications are that conversation can be led by task designers to a certain extent through the manipulation of the context characteristics by means of the proprieties that are attributed to the tasks and to the activities suggested (Luoma, 2009, p. 30). Nevertheless, conversations cannot be predicted in a very precise manner, as Douglas (1998) points out, because the interlocutors are likely to be influenced by the context features considered by them as the most salient and therefore there might be variation depending on the individuals and on the situations involved in the process.

The integration of speaking tasks in FCE Online Course and Tester is an innovation, since speaking skills are not practised nor tested by most previously-existent self-assessment preparatory FCE materials. These materials tend to

give advice about how to prepare for the exam and how to face it, as well as information about its structure and some other details, but they do not allow the candidates to practice and to assess their speaking abilities. Nevertheless, this feature had already been predicted by Gimeno-Sanz (2009b), who foresaw the design of speaking tasks through voice recording in the InGenio online content delivery and management platform which would then add up to the already implemented features:

> Although voice recording has not been programmed into the system, it is nevertheless possible to design exercises where the learner is requested to record his or her own utterances by accessing the Windows Media Player, which can be called up and minimised when not in use. Evaluation of oral production will be subject to learner comparison with a pre-recorded model or by tutor intervention. Future developments include incorporating voice recognition software into the InGenio system (Gimeno-Sanz, 2009b, p. 94).

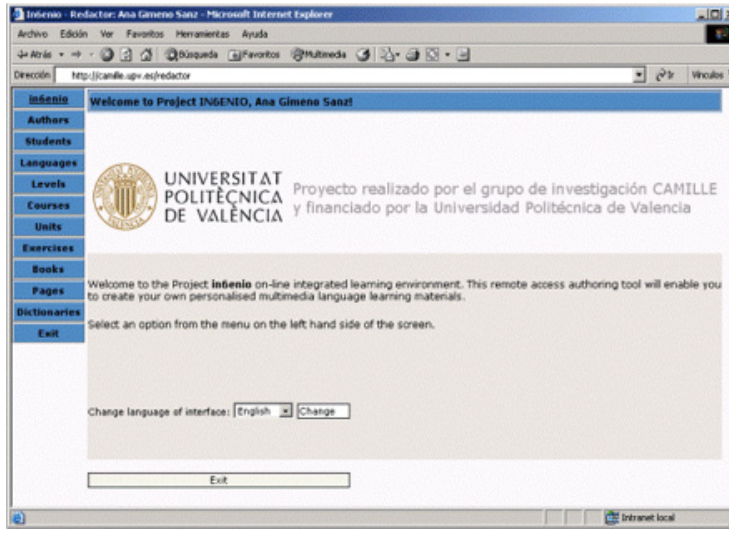
Apart from being an innovative aspect, the inclusion of speaking tasks in these preparatory materials would also be an advantage of the online format of the FCE Course and Tester. The lack of flexibility of the printed versions makes the assessment of the speaking ability an unfeasible task whereas the characteristics of the electronic format that benefits from the recent advances in technology facilitate this kind of assessment. In fact, there are many other advantages about the use of technologies such as computers for the assessment of speaking. One of these advantages is the reliability of the assessment, which can take the form of semi-assisted interviews recording the answers of the examinees to a set of questions, the performance of the candidate thus being safely saved and stored, ready to be subsequently assessed by a qualified rater. Another positive aspect is the authenticity of the tasks based on audiovisual repertoires. In addition, the use of ICT can provide a high degree of interactivity, and very often it has a positive impact and washback effect in the classroom. Furthermore the practicality, for both the examiner and the examinee, of the use of a system based on computational linguistics together with the possibility to assess speaking more objectively are two additional advantages of the use of technology. In fact, the use of e-tools such as voice recording systems allows for the collection of data

while facilitating the evaluation of these data and the possibility to access them in case a revision of the results is needed.

3. Self-assessment and tutor assessment in FCE Online Course and Tester

The modalities of assessment offered by the materials of the InGenio authoring tool and learning management system (Figure 2) developed by the CAMILLE Research Group at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, such as FCE Online Course and Tester, are self-assessment and tutor assessment.

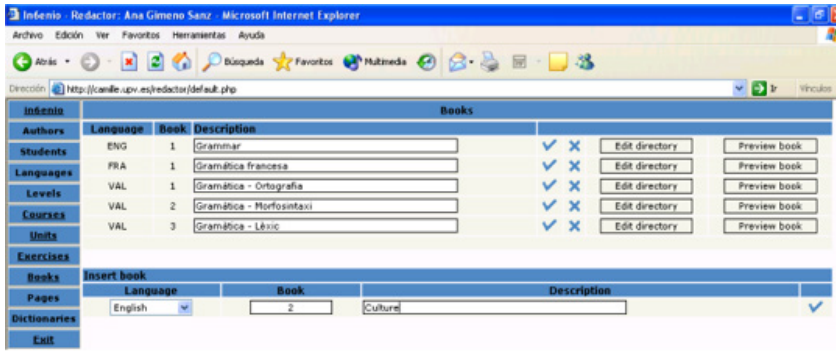
Figure 2. The InGenio authoring tool homepage



The courses and materials published through the content manager platform InGenio allow users to follow the self-assessment modality. It includes a greater variety of materials and activities so as to cater for the needs of learners with different learning styles and preferences, thus enabling them to use the materials in the most convenient way. These materials include a greater number

of reference materials (Figure 3), additional explanations, extra readings and extra self-assessment activities in order to help those students who are mainly learning with less or no support from a human tutor. These features have the advantage of enabling students to conduct their own learning process and to evaluate their own learning achievements in an independent, autonomous and individual way.

Figure 3. InGenio Editor's interface for reference materials



InGenio also provides two modalities of activities: automatically corrected and tutorised activities. On the one hand, the users can find automatically corrected activities, since once the student has completed an exercise or task, the system offers immediate feedback by using the information provided by the authors of the exercises (correct answers and specific feedback). In this case, students receive automatically generated messages in response to the number of correct or incorrect answers. On the other hand, tutorised activities are those which require human intervention by providing personalised feedback programmed or provided by the author of the exercise. This is the case in some of the exercises dealing with oral and written production, where responses are generally more elaborate or cannot be limited in order to give students automatic feedback. The following examples (taken from Gimeno-Sanz, 2009b) show the template where content designers can introduce their feedback (Figure 4), the automatic feedback by items in the way students see it (Figure 5), and the general feedback measured by rate of efficiency (Figure 6).

Figure 4. Author feedback form in InGenio

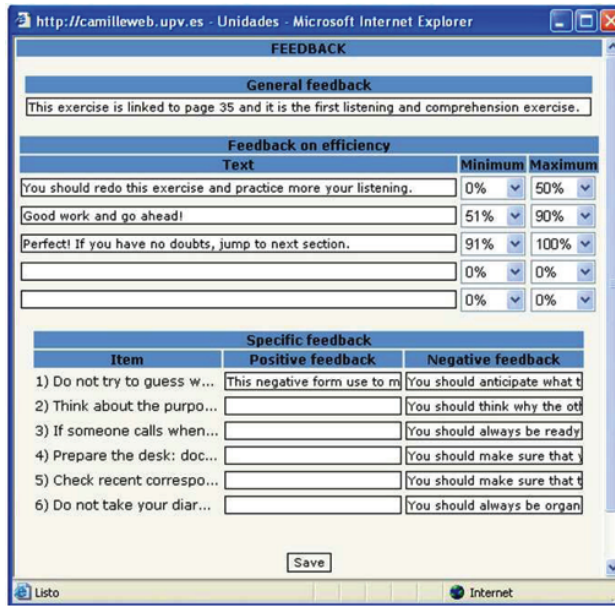


Figure 5. Feedback by item

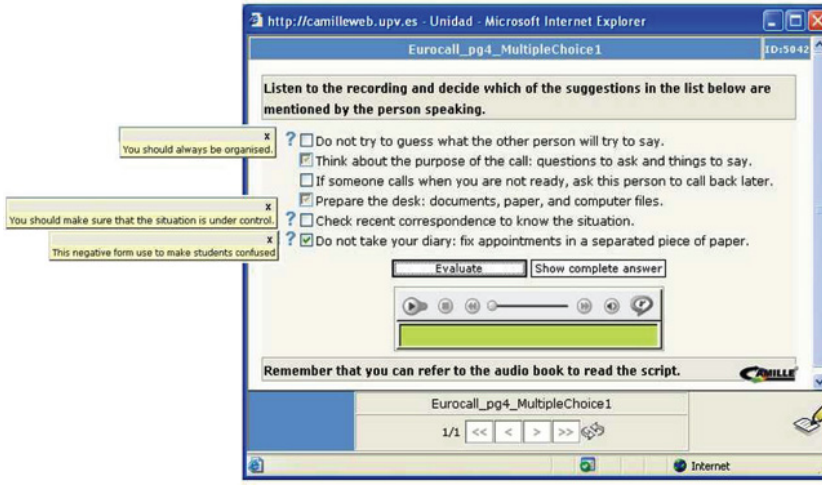
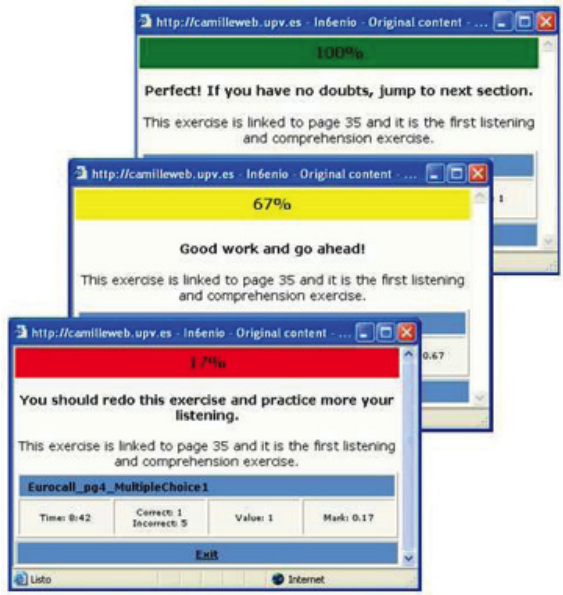


Figure 6. Feedback measured by rate of efficiency



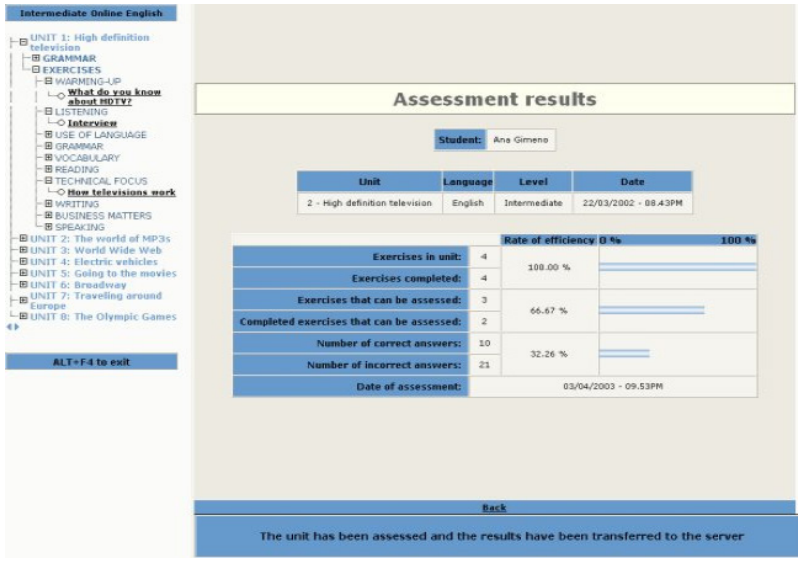
Feedback, obviously, is a key component of these materials as "it should always be clear what kind of mistake has been made", and it is a useful means to "provide not only awareness as to where the mistake lies, but also how to improve the learner's performance" (Gimeno-Sanz, 2009a, p. 88). Moreover, it should be carefully thought through and implemented when writing self-access materials. Abrupt statements such as "No", "Incorrect, try again", etc. must be avoided (Gimeno-Sanz, 2009a, p. 88). In order to provide the most suitable kind of feedback, content providers should try to anticipate and predict learners' behaviour and reactions when completing exercises or activities which are part of self-access materials. These predictions could be based on a corpus of the common mistakes made by Spanish speakers in official B2 examinations that is currently being developed. The information about these mistakes has mainly been taken from the literature based on or informed by corpora such as the Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC)*, but

* Further information available at http://www.cambridge.org/es/elt/?site_locale=es_ES.

further improvements will include analysing the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia students' results in the exam simulations and enriching the InGenio corpus with information about the mistakes the students made.

As for the materials designed for the tutor assessment modality, they provide more support to be used in the classroom context and include resources such as materials specifically designed to provide support for the tutor, a teachers' guide, and also detailed performance reports (Figure 7) about the students and other tracking devices (Gimeno-Sanz, 2008, p. 54). The positive aspect of this modality is the fact that it helps students to become autonomous learners (see Sevilla-Pavón, Martínez-Sáez, & Gimeno-Sanz, in press), by fostering their sense of responsibility in the learning process while providing students with help, guidance and support.

Figure 7. InGenio student's assessment report



InGenio FCE Online Course and Tester also give students access to test simulations, similar to the actual FCE examination in terms of level, structure,

exercise typology and administration mode*. The current development work of the CAMILLE Research Group is now focused on relating and adapting the content of these materials to the scientific and technical context of the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia. This is being done with a view to enriching the students' specific knowledge (e.g., their technical and scientific vocabulary) so as to help them become better professionals in the future. At the same time, these materials aim to enable the students to prepare for an examination that would certify their B2 level of English in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), a new requirement to earn their degree according to the guidelines fixed by the UPV as part of the implementation of the Bologna Process.

The self-assessment exercises and simulations included in the FCE Online Course and Tester benefit from numerous advantages of ICT, such as reliability, interactivity, authenticity, practicality, objectivity, and quick collection/evaluation of data. In this way, students are given the opportunity to face a similar situation to that of the FCE examination. This in turn helps them be aware of their strengths and weaknesses so that they can still work hard on those particular aspects they need to improve before facing the actual test. By doing so, students are likely to get better results not only linguistically but also in affective terms, since being able to improve and even to predict their outcomes before taking the test can foster their self-confidence and motivation while reducing their anxiety levels. These materials also allow designers to generate online assessment elements that provide valuable information about the students, available for teachers at any point so that they can observe and assess adequately the progress of every student. This is particularly useful in those cases in which these materials are used not only in preparation for the FCE examination but also as learning and assessment tools specifically oriented to technical and scientific languages learning.

The FCE Online Course and Tester develop their full potential when used in combination, the first of these preparatory resources being an online course

*These simulations are computer-based and therefore their administration mode is the same as that of the computer-based FCE, the computerised version of the FCE examination which was launched in January 2010 (further information available at http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/exams-info/computer-based-testing.html).

with different kinds of exercises –similar to the ones included in the FCE papers–to be completed first; and an assessment program including self-assessment exercises and simulations of the actual online examination, to be completed once the online course is finished and the students feel ready to face an examination situation. Prior to the design of simulations, a great number of exercises had to be compiled in a corpus of B2 exercises accessible through an online database. These exercises are either independent or based on given texts, the latter being more abundant than the former since texts are also predominant in the actual FCE examination papers. The simulations can be generated upon the users' request, the great number of texts and exercises included in the database allowing for numerous and randomised combinations.

In the development of these preparatory materials, the two main previous aspects underscored by Buck (2001) have been taken into account. First of all, the ultimate objective, which would be to succeed in the FCE examination and thus to ascertain the B2 level of English of our students, follows the application of the guidelines of the Bologna Process and of the Action Plan on Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity*. Then, the profile of the potential examinees is considered, which in our case would be that of students of technical and scientific degrees at UPV aged between 18 and 25, who need to prove their B2 level of English –one of the means fixed by the UPV to do so is a success in the FCE official exam. As for the successful put into practice, Messick's (1996) advice to avoid construct-underrepresentation and construct-irrelevant variance is also being followed. On the one hand, construct-underrepresentation occurs when "the test is too narrow and fails to include important dimensions or facets of the construct" (Messick, 1989, p. 34). On the other hand, construct-irrelevant variance (which is also called surplus construct irrelevancy) takes place when "the test contains excess reliable variance that is irrelevant to the interpreted construct" (Messick, 1989, p. 34), i.e., when the test assesses abilities which are not included in the theoretical description of the construct. Avoiding these inconveniences is a sine qua non requirement in assessment because the correct

*Further information can be found at http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11068_en.htm.

or incorrect interpretation of the scores, which in turn influences the validity of the decisions we make based on those scores, depends on the theoretical and operational soundness of our construct.

4. Conclusion

The InGenio FCE Online Course and Tester are good examples of the way in which the use of ICT in language learning can contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment process of basic skills such as reading, writing, listening and even speaking in two main modalities: student self-assessment and tutor assessment. The students are allowed to choose between these two different modalities of assessment on account of the flexibility of these materials. Their choice depends on their needs, preferences, learning styles and personal characteristics. This is possible thanks to the fact that the students can choose whether to use these materials as part of a blended-learning course (i.e., attending classes and also practicing online), by completing the course and tester contents autonomously while being monitored by a tutor, or following the course in a completely autonomous way (both by paying attention to the automatic feedback reports that show their results and by comparing their answers with the models provided in those cases where automatic correction is not possible).

The self-assessment modality enables students to conduct their own learning process and to assess their own learning achievements in an independent, autonomous and individual way. The tutor assessment fosters the development of the students' autonomy and sense of responsibility while enabling them to get as much help and support from a human tutor as they need. Both modalities have the common goal of making students think critically about themselves and to enable them to make decisions and judgements about their own progress, in spite of the fact that this is done in different ways depending on the modality chosen.

The criteria and the objectives of these materials, as well as the contents and the way these are organised, have been determined by the guidelines of the Action Plan on Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity of the European Union as

well as by the characteristics of the FCE. In this way, the FCE Online Course and Tester are intended to make students develop their communicative abilities in English. This is addressing the necessity that European universities set up a clear and coherent linguistic policy that takes into account linguistic and cultural diversity, as established by the European Commission, while pursuing the goal of helping students acquire a B2 level of English. This level enables them to pass the FCE exam, which is a prerequisite for them to be able to graduate from UPV.

The CAMILLE Research Group will continue working in order to improve its FCE preparatory course and tester in terms of quality, user-friendliness, efficiency, and usefulness. Trying to foster the students' autonomy and to prepare them better for a global society in which the ability to communicate and to interact fluently and spontaneously with speakers of other languages, especially in English, is becoming more and more important.

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