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Revista Lengua y Cultura

Biannual Publication, Vol. 8, No. 15 (2026) 70-80

ISSN: 2683-2321

The relevance of formal and informal assessment on the preparation to take the CAE examination among LELI students

La relevancia de la evaluación formal e informal en el proceso de preparación para presentar el examen CAE entre los alumnos de LELI.

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Abstract:

English proficiency has become fundamental in different contexts, especially in the educational and professional ones. Due to this, preparing candidates for exams as the Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) has become a need for students and educational programs that establish the obtention of the C1 level of English as one of the principal requirements to obtain a degree. This project explores the relevance of two assessment approaches in preparing students from the Bachelor of English Language Teaching (LELI) program at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) to present the CAE examination. Therefore, this investigation focuses on the students´ perceptions about both evaluation practices and how they contribute to their readiness to present this examination. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with four participants, including students and graduates, who had practiced with CAE materials during their preparation process. The results highlight that formal assessments help students to become familiar with the format and the expected performance to obtain the C1 level, even though they may generate stress. On the other hand, informal assessments contribute to build confidence at the same time that the learning process is taking place. The findings acknowledge that the combination of both approaches is essential to strengthen preparation, promote language development, and reduce exam anxiety. As a result, students' proficiency and readiness for the CAE exam improve, while the teaching and learning process within the LELI community is enriched.

Keywords:
Assessment, CAE, formal assessment, informal assessment

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Fecha de recepción: 02/03/2026, Fecha de aceptación: 31/07/2026, Fecha de publicación: 05/10/2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29057/lc.v8i15.17107

Resumen:

El dominio del inglés se ha vuelto fundamental en diversos contextos, especialmente en los educativos y profesionales. Por ello, la preparación de los candidatos para exámenes como el Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) se ha convertido en una necesidad para los estudiantes y los programas educativos que establecen la obtención del nivel C1 de inglés como uno de los principales requisitos para obtener un título. Este estudio explora la relevancia de las evaluaciones formales e informales en la preparación de los estudiantes del programa de Licenciatura en la Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa (LELI) de la Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH) para la presentación del examen CAE. En consecuencia, este estudio se centra en las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre estos tipos de evaluaciones y cómo contribuyen a su preparación para dicho examen. Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas con cuatro participantes, entre estudiantes y egresados, que habían practicado con materiales del CAE durante su proceso de preparación. Los resultados destacan que las evaluaciones formales ayudan a los estudiantes a familiarizarse con el formato y el desempeño esperado para obtener el nivel C1, aunque pueden generarles estrés. Por otro lado, las evaluaciones informales contribuyen a fortalecer la confianza durante el proceso de aprendizaje. Los resultados reconocen que la combinación de ambas evaluaciones es esencial para fortalecer la preparación, promover el desarrollo del idioma y reducir la ansiedad ante los exámenes. El estudio concluye que la integración de métodos de evaluación formales e informales es fundamental para mejorar el dominio del idioma y la preparación de los estudiantes para el examen CAE, al tiempo que enriquece el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje dentro de la comunidad LELI.

***Palabras Clave**:*
Evaluación, CAE, evaluación formal, evaluación informal

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English is one of the most widely spoken languages. Its significance extends beyond social and recreational contexts, as it plays a central role in enhancing employment and educational opportunities. Various institutions often require English proficiency, such as educational bodies, employers, professional organizations, and immigration agencies. To meet these demands, several language testing systems aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) are offered globally. The Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) examination is renowned for assessing the proficiency of advanced learners in the four principal language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The CAE examination assesses English language learners' ability to communicate effectively in professional and academic settings, demonstrating that the individual possesses a high level of language proficiency, cultural understanding, and adaptability across various social interactions.

Given the global relevance of English certifications such as the CAE, the way language proficiency is assessed becomes critically important. Assessment plays a fundamental role in educational contexts, influencing both teaching and learning processes and students' performance. Effective assessment methods allow teachers to grade students accurately, to provide constructive feedback, and tailor their teaching strategies accordingly. Formal assessments, including exams and rubric-based assignments, are often summative and provide quantifiable results. Contrastingly, informal assessments aim to provide learners with feedback that helps them develop their skills and address areas for improvement, offering a less strict approach. For this reason, both formal and informal assessment matter for high-stakes exams like Cambridge C1 Advanced (CAE) because they serve complementary purposes. Together, they balance exam preparedness with learning-oriented development, leading to more robust and transferable language competence (Black & William, 1998).

Although there have been studies related to the CAE examination format, little information related to this specific audience and setting is available. It is still necessary to highlight the assessment practices that in their different forms impact ELT-

LELI bachelor students' performance and perceptions regarding this particular certification. Due to the aforementioned, this study focuses on the relevance of formal and informal assessments in preparing students for the CAE examination, particularly within the Bachelor of English Language Teaching (ELT-LELI) program belonging to the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH). The central research question guiding this investigation is: To what extent do formal and informal assessments contribute to students' preparation for the CAE examination?

This research uses a Qualitative approach, employing interviews. By gathering and comparing different perspectives, the study aims to highlight the importance of formal and informal assessment for the CAE examination, based on participants' views and experiences.

A case study design was selected in order to facilitate analysis of the interview responses. Data analysis included thematic analysis of interview data. By using categorization, the study presents students' perceptions of formal and informal assessment; the findings are expected to raise awareness of these perceptions and highlight the factors that students consider more relevant for these types of assessment within the B.A. in ELT. They will support the implementation of diverse resources and activities.

Literature Review

Assessment in Education

According to Watson (2019), assessment is a multifaceted process that combines observation and measurement to gain insights into student learning. Instructors employ a variety of methods, both graded and non-graded, to evaluate students' progress in a course. Complementary to this, McMillan (2018) defines assessment as "the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in decision making" (p. 6).

This is fundamental to all teaching and learning processes, especially in preparing for an official foreign language certification, such as the CAE, required for LELI students. Through assessment, not only is the progress of students monitored, but they are also guided to achieve the qualifications necessary for the use of the language that allow them to attain the C1 level of English certification.

Formal Assessment (Summative Assessment)

Formal Assessment, also known as summative assessment, is a data-driven method for evaluating students. According to Wright (2012), formal assessment occurs after the conclusion of a learning cycle and typically employs well-defined grading criteria. Exams and essays are examples of formal assessment methods, and are considered high-stakes activities. Similarly, Stanford University (n.d.-b) indicates that students need this type of assessment to determine the extent to which they have achieved a course's learning objectives. Because specific grading tools, such as rubrics, are used to establish whether a student's performance meets the competencies required for a given level of foreign language proficiency, in this case, English, formal assessment plays a crucial role in preparing students for a certificate examination.

Stiggins (2004) highlights additional benefits of formal assessments, including accountability and data-driven decision-making. Consequently, this type of assessment helps students—in this case, LELI students—identify their strengths and areas for improvement, which are essential for taking this exam.

Informal Assessment (Formative Assessment)

In contrast, informal assessment, as explained by Wright (2012), is performance-driven rather than data-driven, seamlessly integrated with ongoing learning activities, and is immediately actionable. Informal assessment predominantly serves the purpose of providing formative feedback to learners, offering a less threatening and less stressful evaluation approach.

According to McMillan (2018), informal evaluation is a flexible, ongoing cycle that educators use to track student progress and direct instruction. In the LELI context, this type of assessment can provide insights into students' individual strengths and limitations throughout the teaching-learning process.

Examinations in Education

According to Stanford University (n.d.-a), examinations play a crucial role in the educational process, serving as a foundation. They are used

for different purposes: as a fundamental part of schooling and to assess students' performance in coursework. Within this context, standardized examinations, such as those developed by Cambridge, serve as a key reference point for high-stakes language assessment. In particular, midterm tests for UAEH LELI students often rely on training tests developed by Cambridge College, which help students become familiar with the format and structure of such assessments and are particularly beneficial for students in the fifth to seventh semesters who are studying and practicing to achieve the C1 English level.

Language Skills in Education

Language is commonly described as a skill that differs from content-based subjects such as Science or Mathematics, which primarily aim to transmit factual knowledge (Husain, 2015). Language education encompasses four fundamental communication skills—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—which constitutes essential components of educational practice. As LELI students and future educators in the English language, these skills are valuable for our knowledge and use of this Lingua Franca as well as crucial in the teaching practice, mainly when a student is being assessed to present an official examination in English.

Cambridge ESOL and EFL examinations

Cambridge English Language Assessment commonly known for its abbreviation (Cambridge ESOL) is the institution in charge of the Cambridge English exam collection and the IELTS exam together with the British Council.
Over the last two decades, the English level exams organized by the University of Cambridge, in the United Kingdom, have achieved great success and projection in institutions and educational centers outside this country also generating abundant publications in the form of manuals and support materials corresponding to the different established levels, which are today used as a reference scale for teaching English as a second or foreign language in numerous educational centers (Palacios, 2023). Currently, the number of levels for general English proficiency is five, each with a corresponding level test that covers the four basic skills (reading, written expression, oral comprehension, and oral expression) and is assigned a scaled difficulty level. The Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) corresponds, as its name indicates, to an advanced level. Cambridge ESOL and EFL examinations are fundamental tools that not only measure in-depth the knowledge that a candidate has about the language but also the use of it, as is tested in the sections of writing and speaking, where the candidate needs to produce different elements in order to demonstrate that their communicative skills are adequate for the proper level. LELI students must end the bachelor degree with a specific domain in the language based on the knowledge that they acquire along the educational program in order to properly guide the learning process of future students based on the competences that are required for international certifications.

Threshold level

The foundation for the threshold level, as introduced by van Ek and Alexander in Strasbourg in 1975, laid the groundwork for a language teaching methodology, initially designed for English but adaptable to any other language. The emerging models of that time served as a guide for other reference tools in different languages which were adapted to the unique features of each of them (Council of Europe, 2020). In the context of this study "Threshold Level" can be defined as a "linguistic competence measurement-tool". This conception of a threshold for communicative competence guided the later creation of more extensive proficiency frameworks. The CAE certification is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which ranges from beginner to proficient levels of English mastery. As LELI students and future English teachers, this knowledge is not only fundamental for successfully guiding students to acquire the competencies necessary for their level, but also to understand the requirements for reaching the advanced level on the CAE examination.

Common European Framework

Due to the academic necessities, the concept of "proficiency levels" was adapted to incorporate the people placed below and above the parameters of the Threshold. To fulfill these demands, the CEFR

(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) was launched in 2001 as a six-level adaptable scale for different contexts and languages. The CEFR, by categorizing competencies, sub-competencies and providing descriptions of each of them established a detailed explanation of the expected performance needed to achieve each of the levels. These descriptors designed to categorize the continuous development of language skills were divided in six levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. In the context of this research, these categories provide a reference to understand the competencies students are expected to demonstrate when preparing for the requirements of the CAE examination.

Methodology Chapter

Overview

This chapter outlines the study design used to examine formal and informal assessments in preparing students enrolled in the Bachelor of English Language Teaching (ELT - LELI) program for the CAE examination. It describes the worldview, approach, design, setting, participants, and the instrument.

Worldview and Approach

In conducting this study, a social constructivist worldview was adopted. According to Creswell (2013), “Constructivism is an interpretive framework whereby individuals seek to understand their world and develop their own particular meanings that correspond to their experience” (p. 8). This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals´ subjective experiences to comprehend how phenomena affect them. Given the focus of this paper on the perspectives regarding the relevance of formal and informal assessments, the social constructivist worldview is particularly useful. It helps in understanding how students perceive and interpret the relevance of these two types of assessments in their preparation for the CAE examination.

Approach

In order to investigate, obtain relevant data, and comprehend a situation based on the subject’s experiences and interactions, the use of qualitative research is the best option (Creswell, 2017).
To address the research question, this study employs a qualitative approach. This method matches with a constructivist worldview aiming to obtain detailed information from the participants’ viewpoints, allowing a deeper understanding of the roles that formal and informal assessments take in their preparation for the CAE exam.

Design

A qualitative research design (case study) was adopted to facilitate a detailed analysis and comparison of ideas regarding the relevance of formal and informal assessment among LELI students and graduates preparing to take the CAE examination. According to Bloomberg (2018), a case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the richness and complexity of a bounded social phenomenon (p. 109).

Setting

This research was conducted at the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (ICSHu), located in Pachuca de Soto, Hgo., which belongs to the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo (UAEH), specifically within the ELT Bachelor classrooms. Our study plan divides the Bachelor’s degree into 8 semesters, with the fifth, sixth, and seventh semesters focusing on C1 English content. One of the main requirements for obtaining a university degree from this bachelor´s program is a certification validating students´ high level of English proficiency, with C1 Advanced as the minimum required and accepted for this purpose.

Participants

Four participants, current students (from 5th to 8th semester) and graduates of the English Teaching Bachelor´s program, distributed by gender and aged 20 to 30 years, were in the preparation phase for the examination and had been exposed to CAE exercises and type exams. To protect the research participants' privacy, only the initials of their names were used through the research.

Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data

collection instrument. An interview guide consisting of approximately 27 open-ended questions was designed to explore the relevance of formal and informal assessment among LELI students. This instrument was selected based on Rubin and Rubin's (2012) statement marking interviews as fundamental in qualitative research due to the direct interaction of the researchers with participants, allowing them to obtain more detailed information. All the participants were provided with an informed consent form that was shared in both oral and digital format and accepted.

Piloting

With the use of semi-structured interviews, a pilot participant was interviewed to identify the usefulness of the questions belonging to the interview, allowing the necessary changes to clarify meaning and obtain answers that aligned with the purpose of this study. Therefore, the data obtained helped clarify and refine the final version of the interview used in this research.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was considered appropriate for this qualitative case study. It involved comparing information obtained from the four participants and examining the consistency and differences in their perspectives in relation to the research question. Since the study focused on participants' perceptions of the relevance of formal and informal assessment in preparation for the CAE examination, the researchers compared participants' responses across the different topics addressed in the semi-structured interviews. The researchers transcribed the interview data and examined it through initial coding and thematic analysis, grouped related codes into categories, and compared participants' responses to identify similarities and differences in their perspectives. The researchers paid particular attention to recurring ideas relevant to the research question, while also considering differences in participants' experiences and perceptions. In addition, the researchers compared participants' perspectives with the theoretical framework and previous studies concerning formal and informal assessment. This comparison provided a basis for interpreting the participants' accounts in relation to existing knowledge and identifying areas of convergence between the empirical data and the literature.

After piloting the interview guide with a single participant, the researchers refined the questions for clarity. They then used the revised guide for all subsequent interviews.

Finally, the researchers considered the different assessment practices mentioned by the participants, including formal tests, mock examinations, quizzes, class discussions, projects, presentations, feedback, and communicative activities. Comparing participants' perspectives across these practices allowed the researchers to examine the phenomenon from multiple aspects rather than focusing on a single assessment practice.

Although these procedures strengthened the trustworthiness of the interpretation, the findings should be understood within the specific context of the LELI program at UAEH. The study was based on four participants' perceptions and experiences; therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all CAE candidates or other academic contexts.

Data analysis

The process for analyzing this information is described in detail below.

Transcription: Each interview was transcribed carefully to ensure accuracy.

Initial Coding: Transcriptions were read multiple times to identify initial codes.

Thematic Analysis: Using the initial codes, themes were identified that correspond to the research question.

Categorization: The themes were categorized into main areas such as Formal Assessment Impact, Informal Assessment Strategies and Preparation Techniques.

Interpretation: Each theme was interpreted in the context of the research objectives, providing light into how different types of assessments influence exam preparation.

Findings and Discussion

Both types of assessment (formal and informal) are particularly useful not only in daily - teaching but also in preparation processes.

Factors such as the continuous practice with both forms of assessment and detailed teacher

feedback provides a mixed and balanced preparation strategy, resulting in a more complete exam preparation, confidence increase and a reduction of stress related to the evaluation.

Limitations

This study presents some limitations that should be taken into consideration in the process of the interpretation of the findings. Firstly, the participants of this study belong to a specific academic setting, consequently a generalization of all the candidates studying for the CAE examination is not the purpose of this research. Secondly, the data presented were gathered through semi-structured interviews relying primarily on the participants' subjective perceptions and experiences.

Formal Assessments

Participants noted that formal assessments, such as mock exams and structured tests, helped them gauge their readiness and identify specific areas needing improvement. This structured framework closely aligns with the CAE exam format, helping students understand its demands. For example, participant MM stated*, "I felt confident because most of the types of writing are the ones that I have practiced before"*. (Participant MM). In the same perspective, participant GPNP mentioned*, "...can be used in order to get feedback on the understanding of these students and also to evaluate their performance".* (Participant GPNP)

According to Wright (2012), formal assessment is important in evaluating students' learning, as it provides opportunities for them to demonstrate their abilities and knowledge within established parameters. This matches with the participant DDA's opinions, who highlights the importance of mock tests and their alignment with the certification theory, stating that she practices more in some specific skills with these exercises, *"In this case, I work more specifically in reading and listening. These are the skills that I work more." (Participant DDA)*

Moreover, students AML and GPNP highlighted that the consistency of formal assessment allows them to create strategies to adapt their performance to fit in the time assigned for the task as well as their own way to answer the questions. As indicated by participant GPNP,

"Formal, you get accustomed to those tests. And as I mentioned, you get accustomed to the structure". (Participant GPNP)

This perspective was shared by participant AML who mentioned,

"The formal test… they are more programmed… you need to prepare, adapt your own strategies to study… deliver your time and your knowledge in the best way" (Participant AML).

Formal assessments help students to identify their strengths and areas of opportunity allowing them to work on those aspects in their study process. Stiggins (2004) states that the information retrieved from these tools helps both teachers and institutions to make academic decisions based on measurable data.

"Since you are expected to complete certain tasks, such as the exam, you need to prepare… to adapt your own strategies to study in order to have the test in time and in the most perfect way that you can reach…" (Participant AML)

Similarly, student GPNP mentioned,

"When you receive…a formal assessment, you can get a grade and you know how many points you need to improve… maybe the students feel more pressure with the formal one, it helps them to know the score". (Participant GPNP).

Student DDA emphasized the importance of feedback and reinforcement, noting that appropriate feedback is crucial for improvement. Also, it was highlighted by the participant the necessity of rubrics, especially in speaking and writing parts, to ensure the assessments align with what the CAE exam requires,

"I think CAE teachers should use the rubrics for the speaking and writing… it's important because that´s what the guide requires. We should assist with using the rubrics as a guide". (Participant DDA).

Despite their benefits, formal assessments can induce significant stress and anxiety. Student GPNP suggested that the high stakes associated with formal assessments might create a fear of failure, which could impact their confidence and overall preparation,

"I feel anxious because sometimes it´s difficult for me to structure my ideas, but in my opinion, it depends on the topic that you are at." (Participant GPNP).

This emotional response can sometimes hinder performance and overshadow the learning benefits, as highlighted by participant AML,

"I feel completely stressed when I need to get ready for this kind of exams". (Participant AML).

In the same path, participant DDA reflected on the stressful nature of projects, which are part of the formal assessment process, indicating they are a necessary but challenging aspect of preparation,

"The projects are stressful. Uh, really a pain on the neck. I don't like that much, but I know it´s part of the assessment- the formal assessment that we need to have". (Participant DDA)

Also, participant DDA expressed that while quizzes are less stressful than exams, they still demonstrate knowledge effectively and could be more beneficial if used more frequently,

"I enjoy them. Because feeling of less stress now that we demonstrate the same. We know that it is an quiz instead of a formal test." (Participant DDA)

As seen above, these statements reveal that students consider formal assessment a relevant tool that helps them build confidence in their performance due to the repetitive and structured nature of the examination activities. Moreover, its parameters mostly align with those used during the CAE certification exam, providing a close approach to the tasks students are expected to complete.

Overall, the information is consistent with Wright´s (2012) ideas by highlighting the importance of formal assessment in evaluating students' learning; both sources emphasize the relevance of grading tools for measuring students' performance. Moreover, AML and DDA participants' perspectives match with Stiggins' (2004) ideas, which highlight that this resource provides teachers and institutions with important information to take into consideration when making decisions related to students' learning.

Informal Assessments

Informal assessments due to their non graded and flexible nature helps students to build confidence and practice their language abilities without causing stress and anxiety related to the formal methods. This kind of assessment, as Wright (2012) notes, is more focused on students´ performance. Informal methods like peer reviews, self-assessment portfolios, and spontaneous speaking activities were highlighted for their role in building confidence and practical skills. One participant noted the value of class discussions, especially for practicing the speaking portion of the exam, which they found less challenging than other skills. As highlighted by participants MM, AML, and GPNP:

"I feel comfortable too. The only thing that I need, I have, to improve is on vocabulary for advanced levels. But it is one of the parts that I feel more confident than in any other one." (Participant MM)

"I feel comfortable also because I have the notion that it´s not something that is going to, it´s not going to affect my final grade, and I can practice." (Participant AML)

"They can help, but to improve your speaking skills".

(Participant GPNP).

Moreover, informal assessments offer flexibility and practical application, making them an effective complement to the structured nature of formal assessments and often stimulating real-life language use, relevant for developing practical skills. Participants (DDA) and (GPNP) mentioned that informal assessments, like communicative activities, help reinforce and make learning more meaningful:

" The projects and communicative activities are good to reinforce and make meaningful the learning" (Participant DDA)

" …the way in which presentations help us is making learning more meaningful…you convey the meaning of words…grammar…in a more meaningful…way… that's directly impacting in your way of studying and learning." (Participant GPNP)

The flexibility of informal assessments, as referred by participants (AML) and (MM), allows for more creative and engaging activities, which can enhance motivation and participation among students as well as build confidence and reduce language anxiety:

"…that is actually carried out every time, and we don't even notice that. The teachers can observe a little bit more. Provide us with…constructive comments, positives so that we can work on what we are doing" (Participant MM).

"Informal assessment is completely related to the measurement of progress of the students…You can evaluate your students with…activities that don't necessarily weigh heavily on their final grade." (Participant AML).

Additionally, participants (GPNP) and (AML) indicated that the continuous feedback from informal assessments was crucial for ongoing improvement during the following activities. This immediate and iterative feedback loop allows students to correct mistakes and refine their skills

in real-time,
"Doing, you know, appropriate feedback we need that in order to improve. Feedback is important. Feedback and reinforcement" (Participant GPNP*), "…it's very important. I wish that we could have more, especially in the writing test... And speaking, it's also crucial to have a kind of assessment..."* (Participant AML).
The speaking part was particularly flagged for improvement, owing to this assessment, which allows students to convey meaning and use some structures and vocabulary.
The previous claims align with McMillan´s (2018) assertion that establishes informal assessment as a flexible, ongoing process used by teachers to monitor student learning and guide instruction. Activities not related to a final grade allow students to identify their learning necessities and, in the case of professors, adapt their teaching strategies to meet students' needs in order to help them to achieve their academic goals.

Preparation Strategies: Formal and informal assessment

The combination of formal and informal assessments together with instructor feedback and consistent practice with CAE type exercises allows for an effective preparation according to the participants. Also, the use of printed or digital resources and the importance of the study place were mentioned. Participants AML, DDA, GPNP, and MM reported that,
"…practice at least 2 or 3 times before…in quiet environments…have a position where I can listen more…to understand better…for speaking, I try to record, to provide my own answers…" (Participant AML).
"... I tried to get the gist… of what they're talking. What is, taking notes? I tried to focus on reading first… and the use of English part…what is more time-consuming I try to do it first. And then the easiest part" (Participant DDA).
"…underline…the main ideas… when I read …I look for the underlying phrases... writing…maybe brainstorming first…The listening… I write the specific information about its speaker…what they are asking" (Participant GPNP)
"Reading…I chose a science fiction book because I lack advanced vocabulary... I also time myself to improve my reading speed... For listening... I write down the lyrics to see if I've improved my listening comprehension." (Participant MM).
The past statements identify the use of both types of assessment on different study strategies specifically chosen for each of the different parts of the exam (reading, listening, writing and speaking). External factors, such as the usual study place, also impact students' preparation.

Feedback

Tailored feedback from instructors, based on both formal and informal assessments, played a significant role in student preparation. Personalized guidance helped students focus on their specific areas of need, making their study efforts more efficient and effective. Participant DDA highlighted the importance of feedback by stating, "Doing appropriate feedback is important. Reinforcement is a consequence of that feedback" (Participant DDA).
Participant MM noticed that although informal assessment does not provide specific grades, it offers valuable comments that can impact students' performance:
"We don't receive any specific grades for our results. We just can have some comments, some ideas you´ve proven in a specific area according to what we show." (Participant MM).
Group activities and presentations were highlighted as important due to the opportunities to get feedback, also class discussions were signaled as valuable because of the use of language intended to be used in real contexts, the acquisition of new vocabulary through others speech and the exchanging of different points of view based on different sources. The extracts indicate that feedback not only from teachers but also classmates play a crucial role in the preparation for the CAE examination, and provides opportunities to develop the different skills, as mentioned by participant AML*: "I learn from my classmates some phrases and some things that has to do with grammar and vocabulary… as we are required to have at the end of this BA or C1 level".*
"…We exchange our ideas…we base our ideas in something that we have read before…we can develop more…speaking strategies. You should also practice that skill…in your own words, you explain it to others." (Participant AML).
Additionally, class quizzes were seen as beneficial, even if they do not provide a grade, because they offer individual feedback from the

teacher, allowing students to progress continuously.
"Even though they are not graded, you can have, like, your own personalized feedback by the teacher. And in that way, you can improve continuously" (Participant GPNP).

Consistent Practice

Consistent practice with CAE-type exercises and informal assessments was emphasized as crucial for success. Participants M.M. and G.P.N.P. mentioned practicing at least three times per week. In the case of participant G.P.N.P., the teachers evaluating them with one test per week are very helpful. Participants DDA and MM shared a similar view, highlighting the importance of mock tests at least twice a week, as did participant MM, who mentioned practicing at least two or three times during the term in the seventh semester.
"I´m practicing this at least three times per week" (M.M). *"Yeah, I feel that they help a lot if you practice, maybe not all every day, but yeah, like three times a week. And I don´t know, maybe teachers can evaluate them with one test per week."* (G.P.N.P).
"I do a lot of mock test exercises. Maybe once a week, daily? No, daily, no. It´s not too much. I wouldn´t dare to say that. But at least twice, so very awake" (DDA)
"I used to practice, uh, at least 2 or 3, uh, times at the term when I was on the seventh semester." (M.M).
These opinions not only highlight the importance of regular and repeated practice sessions, such as mock tests and exercises to prepare for the CAE exam but also are consistent with Watson (2019) and McMillan (2018) statements which mentioned that regular engagement with different types of assessment activities helps to maintain and improve language skills over time as well as develop confidence and test-taking strategies. This specific view contributes to student learning and preparation for specific purposes (e.g., presenting a certification exam), highlighting the value of varied and regular assessment activities to succeed in this type of evaluation.

Conclusion

The study identifies the relevance of formal and informal assessment in preparing LELI students for the CAE examination at the UAEH. This research highlights the importance of both types of assessment for the improvement of their language competencies and abilities in order to obtain the C1 certificate.
Formal assessments, characterized by structured, high-stakes evaluations such as exams and written assignments, are crucial for providing objective measurements of students' language skills. By using specific rubrics, the students not only can identify their strengths and weaknesses but are also given the opportunity to adapt their performance based on the specific requirements of the examination. On the other hand, informal assessments integrated into daily learning activities provide immediate, formative feedback. Informal assessments help identify individual needs, allowing teachers and students to focus on strategies to reinforce personal strengths and work on the weaknesses in order to improve their performance as well as reduce anxiety, making the learning process more engaging. The results suggest that effective assessment helps students to improve their performance in academic tasks and helps them to prepare for the certification. The combination of formal and informal assessments, along with the feedback and regular practice, helps to build an integral strategy where students can be fully prepared to take the examination. This holistic approach to assessment helps students achieve high levels of English proficiency, ultimately enhancing their educational prospects.

Declaraciones del articulo

1. Relevancia social
Este trabajo aborda la relevancia de la evaluación formal e informal en el proceso de preparación para presentar el examen CAE que incluye a los alumnos de la licenciatura en la Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa de la Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo de 5to a 8vo semestre. Sus resultados pueden contribuir a comprender como la evaluación tanto formal e informal dentro y fuera de las aulas ayuda a desarrollar las habilidades comunicativas de los alumnos entrevistados con el objetivo de presentar la anterior mencionada evaluación. La contribución de este trabajo es principalmente teórica. No se identifica una aplicación social directa inmediata.

2. Disponibilidad de datos y materiales
Los datos no están disponibles públicamente

debido a la protección de la participación anónima de los entrevistados. Las condiciones para solicitar acceso pueden consultarse con Guadalupe Abigail Ureña Salas, respetando las restricciones aplicables.

3. Uso de inteligencia artificial

Las personas autoras declaran que no utilizaron herramientas de inteligencia artificial generativa en la preparación de este manuscrito.

4. Consideraciones éticas

No aplica la aprobación por comité de ética por la naturaleza del estudio. Sin embargo, se obtuvo el consentimiento informado de todos los participantes de manera previa a la aplicación de los instrumentos, garantizando el anonimato y la confidencialidad de los datos recolectados.

5. Contribuciones de autoría (CRediT)

Guadalupe Abigail Ureña Salas: Conceptualización, curación de datos, investigadora, redacción.

Tomás Hernández Ángeles: Supervisión, revisión y edición.

Todas las personas autoras revisaron y aprobaron la versión final del manuscrito.

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