

TESTING AND ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This present paper aims at discussing the term Testing and Assessment and also the use of them in English language instruction. Most of the teachers consider both testing and assessment are the same aspects; assessment is much more than test. Assessment refers to a variety of ways collecting information on learners' language ability or achievement, although testing and assessment are often used interchangeably, assessment is an umbrella term for all types of measures used to evaluate students' progress and test is a subcategory of assessment. Teachers are used to on their own in constructing tests to measure students' progress and performance. The result is they write traditional grammar-based items in a discrete point format that doesn't fit the communicative of the learning materials or the underlying teaching principles. By having a better understanding both testing and assessment, teachers can distinguish and identify both of them and it is hoped that they can create or construct better testing and assessment for their students based on teaching principles.

Keywords: Testing, Assessment

INTRODUCTION

Language is used in social interactions to accomplish purposeful tasks (e.g. interacting with another individual in a conversation, writing a text, finding information in a chart or a schedule). Performance is assessed by documenting the successful completion of the task or by using a rubric to assess various dimensions of carrying out the task (e.g. listening comprehension and language complexity in responses to questions in oral interview (Alamprese & Kay, 1993; Van Duzer and Berdan, 1999).

Language teachers are often faced with the responsibility of deciding how they intend to measure outcomes and consider what role assessment will play in instruction. Assessment is how to identify the learners' needs, document their progress, and determine how the teachers are doing as teachers and planners (Jerrold, 2012). That being said, how to know the teachers are doing it is right, how to know that the assessment tools are used measure what they intend them to.

These are the questions that teachers must continually ask to get the best snapshot of the progress of the learners and the effectiveness of the programs.

Traditionally, the most common way to measure achievement and proficiency in language learning has been the test. Even though alternatives forms of assessment are growing in popularity, most teachers still use this old standby. And while many teachers may be gifted in classroom, even the best may need some help constructing reliable test items. Carmen (1995) discussed the role of progress testing in the classroom and the importance of matching testing to instruction. She viewed testing as a tool that can help teachers identify students strengths and weaknesses and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs.

In recent years much has been made of alternative forms of assessment. Whether the teachers want to include students' portfolios or web-based testing in curricula, the focus should always be on gathering information that reflects how

well the students have learned what the teachers tried to teach them.

Assessment is one of the most difficult and important parts of the teachers' job. Ideally, it should be seen as a means to guide the students on their road to learning, to know how they are progressing and to gauge the effectiveness of our own methodology and materials. And this article, the writer will offer two general recommendations to help language teachers and others understand, distinguish and identify both testing and assessment in language teaching.

TESTING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Testing is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge or performance in a given domain and the method must be explicit and structured, like: Multiple-choice questions with prescribed correct answers; A writing prompt with a scoring rubric; An oral interview based on a question script and a checklist of expected responses to be filled by the administrator (Yesdil.com).

Teaching sets up the practice games of language learning: the opportunities for learners to listen, think, take, risk, set goals and process feedback from the teacher (coach) and then recycle through the skills that they are trying to master. During these practice activities, teachers are indeed observing students' performance and making various evaluations of each learner. Then it can be said that testing and assessment are subsets of teaching. Assessment is related to the learner and his/her achievements, while testing is part of assessment and it measures learner achievement.

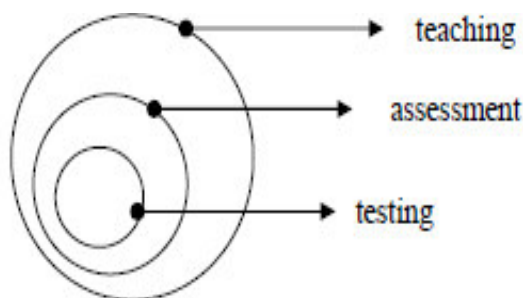


Figure 1: The picture of testing and assessment as the subsets of teaching

In most classrooms today, English is taught through communicative textbooks that provide neither accompanying tests nor any guidance for test construction. Teachers are on their own in constructing tests to measure student progress and performance. The result is they write traditional grammar-based items in a discrete point format that does not fit the communicative orientation of the textbook or the underlying teaching principles. In many cases, teachers have been reluctant to administer regular tests. Stevenson and Riewe (1986) give the following reasons for this: a) Teachers consider testing too time-consuming, taking away valuable class time, b) They identify testing with mathematics and statistics, c) Testing goes against humanistic approaches to teaching, d) They have gotten little guidance in constructing tests in either pre-service or in-service training, e) Teachers feel that the time and effort they put into writing and correcting tests is not acknowledged with additional pay or personal praise, f) Testing can be as frightening and frustrating to the teacher as it is for the students. And also one of the important first tasks for any test writer is to determine the purpose of the test. Defining the purpose aids in selection of the right type of test. This table shows the purpose of many of the common test types.

Table 1: Common Test Types	
Test Type	Main Purpose
Placement tests	Place students at appropriate level of instruction within program
Diagnostic tests	Identify students' strengths and weaknesses for remediation
Progress tests or in-course tasks	Provide information about mastery or difficulty with course materials
Achievement tests	Provide information about students' attainment of course outcomes at end of course or within the program
Standardized tests	Provide measure of students' proficiency using international benchmarks

Table 1: Common Test Types

THE FUNCTION OF TESTING

A well-planned course should measure the extent to which students have fulfilled course objectives and the progress tests are a central part of the learning process, so the reasons for testing can be identified: a) Testing tells teachers what students can or cannot do-in other words, tests show teachers how successful their teaching has been. It provides washback for them to adjust and change course content and teaching styles where necessary. b) Testing tells students how well they are progressing. This may stimulate them to take learning more seriously. c) By identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, testing can help identify areas for remedial work. d) Testing will help evaluate the effectiveness of the programme, course books, materials and methods.

ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The term assessment usually evokes images of an end-of-course paper and pencil test designed to tell both teachers and students how much material the

students doesn't know or hasn't yet mastered. However, assessment is much more than tests. Assessment includes a broad range of activities and tasks that teachers use to evaluate student progress and growth on a daily basis. Assessment is how to identify the learners' needs, document their progress, and determine how the teachers are doing as teachers and planners (Jerrold, 2012).

Language tests are simply instruments or procedures for gathering particular kinds of information, typically information having to do with students' language abilities. Tests may have variety of formats, lengths, item types, scoring criteria, and media. While language assessment is the process of using language tests to accomplish particular jobs in language classrooms and programs. In language assessment, first gather information in a systemic way with the help of language testing tools. For example, the teachers may use an oral interview to gather information about students' speaking abilities, and then make interpretations based on that information or make interpretations about students' abilities to perform a range of real-world speaking tasks based on how

well students perform in the oral interview. Finally, based on these interpretations, make a decision or take action within the classroom or program. The teachers may decide that students need more work on oral fluency and should therefore devote more class time to fluency-oriented activities. Language assessment is much more than simply giving a language test; it is the entire process of test use. Indeed, the ultimate goal of language assessment is to use tests to better inform us on the decisions we make and the actions we take in language education. (John M. Norris, 2000).

Assessment refers to a variety of ways of collecting information on learner's language ability or achievement. Although testing and assessment are often used interchangeably, it is an umbrella term for all types of measures used to evaluate student progress. A test is a formal, systematic (usually paper-and-pencil) procedure used to gather information about student's behavior. There are two kinds of assessment, namely Informal Assessment and Formal Assessment. This table shows the significant differences between both of them.

ASSESSMENT

Informal Assessment	Formal Assessment
<p>a. It is incidental, unplanned comments and responses. Example include: “<i>Nice job!</i>” “<i>Well done!</i>” “<i>Good work!</i>” “<i>Did you say can or can't?</i>” “<i>Broke or break!</i>”, or putting a smile emoticon on some homework</p> <p>b. Classroom tasks are designed to elicit performance without recording results and making fixed judgements about a student's competence. Example of unrecorded assessment: marginal comments on papers, responding to a draft of an essay, advice about how to better pronounce a word, a suggestion for a strategy for compensating for a reading difficulty, and showing how to modify a student's note-taking to better remember the content of a lecture</p>	<p>a. Exercises or procedures specifically designed to tap into a storehouse of skills and knowledge</p> <p>b. Systematic, planned sampling techniques constructed to give teacher and student an appraisal of student achievement. Example tournament games that occur periodically in the course of teaching.</p> <p>c. It can be said that all test are formal assessments, but not all formal assessment is testing. Example: A student's journal of portfolio of materials can be used as a formal assessment of the attainment of the certain course objectives, but it is problematic to call those two procedures test; A systematic set of observations of a student's frequency of oral participation in class is certainly of formal assessment, but not a test</p>

Table 2: Informal and Formal Assessment

THE FUNCTION OF ASSESSMENT

There are two kinds of the function of an assessment, Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment. Formative assessment is to evaluate students in the process of “forming” their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process. It provides the ongoing development of the learner’s language, for example: when the teachers give a student a comment or a suggestion, or call attention to an error, that feedback is offered to improve the learner’s language ability. And virtually all kinds of informal assessment are formative. While summative assessment aims to measure or summarize what a student has grasped and typically occurs at the end of a course. It does not necessarily point the way to future progress, for example: final exams in a course and general proficiency exams and all tests/formal assessment (quizzes, periodic review tests, midterm exams, etc) are summative.

CONCLUSION

Teaching, assessment and testing are three inseparable aspects of the teachers’ tasks. This article contents that testing and assessment have an essential role in the development of students’ communicative competence. It is hoped this outlines in this paper can encourage teachers to read more on the subject and to try some of the suggestion given.

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