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**TESTING AND ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION**

**Course Outline**

* Testing in English language instruction
* The function of testing
* Characteristics of good tests
* Assessment in English language instruction
* The function of 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.

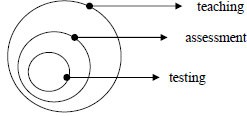
In recent years much has been made of alternative forms of assessment. Whether the teachers want to include students’ portfolios or web-based testing in curricula, the focus should always be on gathering information that reflects how well the students have learned what the teachers tried to teach them.

*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.

**1. 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 leaner achievement



**Figure 01:** **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 ad correcting tests is not acknowledged with additional pay or personal praise, f) Testing can be as frightening and frustrating to the teacher as it for the students. And also one of the important first tasks f 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.

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| **Table 1: Common Test Types** | |
| **Test Type** | **Main Purpose** |
| 1-Placement tests | Place students at appropriate level of  instruction within program |
| 2-Diagnostic tests | Identify students' strengths and weaknesses  for remediation |
| 3-Progress tests or in-course tasks | Provide information about mastery or difficulty  with course materials |
| 4-Achievement tests | Provide information about students' attainment of course outcomes at end of course  or within the program |
| 5-Standardized tests | Provide measure of students' proficiency  using international benchmarks |

**2.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 bee. 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.

**3.Characteristcs of good test**

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**3.1.Validity**

It refers to extent to which the test measures what it intends to measure. For example, when an intelligent test is developed to assess the level of intelligence, it should assess the intelligence of the person, not other factors.

It means that it measures what it is supposed to measure. It tests what it ought to test. A good test which measures control of grammar should have no difficult lexical items.

Validity explains us whether the test fulfils the objective of its development. There are many methods to assess validity of a test.

**3.2.Usability**

It means the degree to which the tests are used without much expenditure of time, money and effort. It also means practicability. Factors that determine usability are: administrability, scorability, interpretability, economy and proper mechanical makeup of the test.

**3.3. Administrability**

It means that the test can be administered with ease, clarity and uniformity. Directions must be made simple, clear and concise. Time limits, oral instructions and sample questions are specified. Provisions for preparation, distribution, and collection of test materials must be definite. Scorability is concerned on scoring of test. A good test is easy to score thus: scoring direction is clear, scoring key is simple, answer is available, and machine scoring as much as possible be made possible. Test results can be useful if after evaluation it is interpreted. Correct interpretation and application of test results is very useful for sound educational decisions.

**3.4.Reliability**

This refers to the extent to which they obtained results are consistent or reliable. When the test is administered on the same sample for more than once with a reasonable gap of time, a reliable test will yield same scores. It means the test is trustworthy. There are many methods of testing reliability of a test. There are different theories to explain the concept of reliability in a scientific way. Firs and simplest: A test is reliable if we get the same results repeatedly. Second: when a test gives consistent results. Third: reliability is ratio of true score variance to observed score variance.

Reliability is defined as the extent to which an assessment yields consistent information about the knowledge, skills, or abilities being assessed. An assessment is considered reliable if the same results are yielded each time the test is administered.

For example, if we took a test in History today to assess our understanding of World War I and then took another test on World War I next week, we would expect to see similar scores on both tests. This would indicate the assessment was reliable.

Reliability in an assessment is important because assessments provide information about student achievement and progress.

If it is taken again by ( same students, same conditions ), the score will be almost the same regarding that the time between the test and the retest is of reasonable length. If it is given twice to same students under the same circumstances, it will produce almost the same results. In this case it is said that the test provides consistency in measuring the items being evaluated.

There are many conditions that may impact reliability. They include: day-to-day changes in the student, such as energy level, motivation, emotional stress, and even hunger; the physical environment, which includes classroom temperature, outside noises, and distractions; administration of the assessment, which includes changes in test instructions and differences in how the teacher responds to questions about the test; and subjectivity of the test scorer.

**4.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 earner’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.

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| **Informal Assessment** | **Formal Assessment** |
| 1. It is incidental, unplanned comments and responses. Example include: “*Nice job!” “Well done!” “ Good work!” “*Did you say *can* or *can’t*?” “*Broke* or *break!”,* or putting a smile emoticon on some homework 2. 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 | 1. Exercises or procedures specifically designed to tap into a storehouse of skills and knowledge 2. 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. 3. 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 |

**4.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.

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“Sometimes we’re tested not to show our weaknesses, but to discover our strength”