

Assessing Students' Learning

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Some definitions

- **A test** is narrow in focus, designed to measure a set of skills or behaviours at one point in time.
- **Assessment** is broader in scope and involves gathering information over a period of time. (might include formal tests, classroom observations, student self-assessments, or from other data sources).
- **Evaluation** applies assessment data that have been scored and analysed to make judgements, or draw inferences about students and educational programmes.

Evaluation

Measurement

Test

Teaching

Assessment

Test

- A test, then is a subset of assessment, it is not the only form of assessment that the teacher can make.
- Assessment is an ongoing process; whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the student's performance.

Performance vs. Competence

- Performance is a faulty representation of competence.
- Competence refers to what somebody knows about something, performance refers to what really occurs in practice.
- Faulty? Influenced by memory lapses and limitations, distractions, hesitation, psychological restrictions.

Language Assessment

- Finding out how far students have progressed and attained the learning objectives
- informing teachers about the effectiveness of teaching approaches they are using in giving instruction as well as of teaching materials

- assisting teachers in diagnosing their students' specific strengths and weaknesses in learning.
- providing a fresh insight into what strategies the students employ in learning and in acquiring the language

What do we assess?

- Communication that happens in texts
- Students' ability to create and respond to texts
- In listening, speaking, reading, and writing

What kinds of assessment should we choose?

- We can carry out **informal assessment** during a lesson by monitoring (i.e. listening carefully) and observing learners while they are doing ordinary classroom activities.

- To get more information about the progress of individual learners, we also need to carry out **formal assessment** (e.g. a class test).
- When planning assessment, we need to think first about our reasons for assessing learners. Then we can decide when and how often to assess them, and choose what methods of assessment we are going to use.

KEY CONCEPTS

- What are the differences between formal and informal assessment?
- **Formal assessment:**
 - Assessment tasks: tests, examinations
 - Marking: learners receive grades (% , A-F, Pass/Fail, etc.)
 - Purpose:
 - a. To assess overall language ability (proficiency test)

Formal Assessment

- b. To assess learning at the end of a course (achievement test)
- c. To assess learning at the end of part of a course (progress test)
- d. To decide if learners can continue to the next level

Informal Assessment

- Assessment tasks: normal classroom teaching and learning activities, homework tasks
- Marking: teacher keeps records of progress but does not give grades

Purposes of Informal Assessment

- a. Feedback for the teacher (i.e. to find out how successful our teaching has been)
- b. to help us improve our procedures or choose different materials or activities for future lessons
- c. feedback for learners about what they can do and what they still need to work on

Key Concepts

- Formal assessment can consist of tasks with single answers (e.g. multiple-choice questions, matching task, true/false questions) that are easy to mark. The purpose of giving objective test tasks like these will give us information about learners' knowledge of particular language items and specific areas of language skills.
- Formal assessment may also make use of more real-life tasks, such as oral interviews, letters and essays, to get information about learners' general ability to use spoken and written language.

- When preparing a class test, it is important to include a number of different tasks, so that we get a good picture of our learners' strengths and weaknesses, and to test the main things we have taught.
- In the case of productive skills, whether the assessment is formal or informal, we need to judge learners' performance against clear descriptions of different levels of skill. These may be general descriptions of speaking or writing or they may give separate descriptions of different subskills.

Traditional (Standardized) vs. alternative Assessment

- Traditionally, assessing means applying a set of test items in a formal situation, mostly in written.
- Includes tests of any types (Achievement, Aptitude, Diagnostic, Placement, Performance/proficiency, Progress tests) and of any forms (essay, multiple choice, matching, cloze, C-test, matching, T/F)

ORAL LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

- oral interviews,
- story retelling, simulations/situations (role play),
- directed dialogues,
- incomplete story/topic prompts which students are asked to complete,
- picture cues,
- teacher observation checklists,
- and student self-evaluations

Reading Assessment

1. Multiple Choice
2. Short Answer
3. Gap Filling
4. Information Transfer

Testing reading skills by supplying simple information on the table, following a route on a map, labelling pictures, and so on.

5. Rating scales

A rating scale is a checklist that contains predetermined performance tasks and a systematic procedure for indicating a student's level of performance relative to specific criteria

Writing Assessment

Prompt:

1. Instruction
2. Diagram
3. A series of pictures

Items assessed: Dictions, grammar, organisation, punctuation, content, spelling, patterns

Designing writing samples

- Provide a choice of topics
- Check the topic for cultural bias

Listening Assessment

1. Multiple Choice
2. Short answer
3. Gap filling

Alternative methods of assessments

- observation,
- self-and peer- assessment,
- portfolio,
- conferencing,
- interview,
- learning logs and teacher checklist.

Portfolio Assessment

- is the use of records of a student's work over time and in a variety of modes to show the depth, breadth, and development of the student's abilities;
- is the purposeful and systematic collection of student work that reflects accomplishment relative to specific instructional goals or objectives;
- can be used as an approach for combining the information from both alternative and standardized assessments; and
- has as key elements student reflection and self-monitoring.

Scoring Rubrics/Rating Scales for Productive Skills

- **Global/Holistic Assessment Scales:** creating pre-defined descriptions of performance (what Ss need to be capable of in order to gain the required marks)
- **Analytic Profiles:** to get more reliable marking, by analyzing performance in details. Marks are awarded for different elements.

Speaking (Holistic)

Score	Description
0	The speaker is almost unintelligible, uses words wrongly, no sign of grammatical understanding
1	Transmits very basic ideas, using individual words rather than phrases, very hesitant, pronunciation makes intelligibility difficult

2	Transmits ideas in a fairly stilted way, some pronunciation problems and examples of grammatical and lexical misuse and gaps
3	Transmits ideas moderately clearly, some minor hesitations, and the speaker makes him/herself understood.
4	Speaks fairly fluently, communicate ideas with not too much trouble, some minor problem of grammar and accuracy
5	Speaks fluently with a wide variety of lexis and expressions with only very few mistakes

Method of Assessing Productive Skills: Example 2, Analytic

	Accuracy	Fluency	Pronunciation
5	Grammatical and lexical accuracy extremely high	Speaks fluently without hesitation or searching for words	Very clear; stress and intonation help to make meaning clear
4	Quite accurate; some errors, but meaning is always clear	Some hesitation and sometimes has to search for words	Generally clear; reasonable control of stress and intonation
3	Frequent errors; meaning is not always clear	Quite hesitant; limited range of vocabulary and structure	Frequent errors; not always clear enough to understand
2	Very frequent errors; difficulty in making meaning clear	Extremely hesitant; very limited range of language available	Very frequent errors; often very difficult to understand
1	Almost unable to communicate		

Task 1: Writing (Analytic)

Criteria	0	1	2	3	4
Grammar		Major mistakes	Frequent mistakes	Minor mistakes	Totally correct
Punctuation					
Diction					

Task 2. Writing (Holistic)

Score	Description
6	
5	
4	
3	
2	
1	Single words/ phrases, copying the model

2

- Begin to convey meaning
- Write simple sentences/ phrases
- Uses limited or repetitious vocabulary
- Uses little or no mechanics
- Many misspelling

3

- Attempt to express idea coherently
- Begin to write paragraph by organizing ideas
- Write primarily simple sentences
- Uses high frequency words
- Write with grammatical/ mechanical errors that sometimes diminish communication

4

- Expresses ideas coherently most of the time
- Develop a logical paragraph
- Write with a variety of sentence structures with a limited use of transitions
- Chooses vocabulary that is often adequate to purposes
- Write with grammatical/ mechanical errors that seldom diminish communication

5

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- Convey meaning clearly and effectively

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- Jones, H. and Wheeler, T. 1996. A training course for TEFL. Oxford: OUP.

Backwash effects of test

- Washback effect
- Highstake test