



SUBSTITUTING TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT TYPES WITH ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN HEES: PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

In any educational establishment it is important to keep the balance between qualitative and quantitative outcomes. In this regard, assessment should serve as a motivational and helpful tool while evaluating student's language performance. In many high educational establishments, it is common thing to accept summative assessment as a 'stressful and discouraging moment'. As this type of assessment is commonly based on paper-pencil and theory-based tasks, students often feel reluctant to do them with motivation. Moreover, when it comes to developing teaching methodological skills (pre-serves teaching), assessment should serve as a practical tool to see the effectiveness of acquired theoretical knowledge in real life. Therefore, including formative assessment features into summative assessment would be more effective to see realistic outcome of the learning process. Even though there was a strong rationale for using summative assessment in HEE which are specialized to teach pre-service teachers, including to check theoretical knowledge and outlook by providing written assignments and individual tests. However, it is already high time to reform summative assessment and focus on more 'practical side' of knowledge as the primary goal is not only 'learning' but using it effectively. In this regard, in the domain of language teaching, Project based approaches are becoming effective to use as through learning language students also train practical skills. This article focuses on providing common negative effects of traditional assessments in measuring language proficiency in HEE and some recommendations to improve the situation.

In bachelor degree, it is already time for teacher to encourage students to be autonomous learners and enthusiastic practitioners. In bachelor degree, as they are future pedagogues it is vitally important to improve learners' HOT skills and creativeness rather than forcing them to remember theoretical information and allowing them to use ready-made materials from the internet. Ensuring

systematic and continuous assessment in core subjects could be an appropriate way to improve learning outcome.

In this regard, it is vital to take into account principles of testing which includes reliability, validity, practicality and authenticity. Skill-based tests seem to be 'grilling' and frustrating for most students. Such tests aim to measure learners' proficiency level relying on a 'one-day-exam'. However, in most cases these tests may lack of student-reliability feature. According to Mousavi (2009, p. 804)¹, due to physical and psychological factors, including anxiety, nervousness, fatigue or some temporary illnesses some students achieve lower scores or even fail.

Timing issue is also one of the most distracting factors while taking exams. As Bachman (1990)² said, 'timing tests may cause discrimination between students who 'know' the material and those who significantly affected by timing clock. In other words, the ones who has brilliant memory and fast working ability can be succeed in such tests. We should not forget that this university aim to prepare good practitioners, not those with good memory.

Writing '12-page-length' answers has already become a burden for many students in this university as it does not meet the standards of test validity. If a course's objective to increase students' practicality, why it is necessary to fill the whole notebook. While checking instructors tend to focus on length of answers instead of considering their subjective perspectives and preciseness of answers.

Cheating and plagiarism are common problems in this context since there is not any strict regulations and punishments to control the uniqueness of student work. Even though, some websites are used to decrease this effect, most

¹ Mousavi, S. A. (2009). An encyclopedic dictionary of language testing. Tehran: Rahnama Publications.

² Bachman, L. (1990). Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



teachers inclined to ignoring using these programs appropriately. Specifically, students with lower proficiency level may achieve high scores by cheating or plagiarizing. Applying 'Turnitin' service in order to check originality of written assignments.

SUGGESTIONS

- A) Using on-going (formative) assessment instead of summative for core subjects, like methodology, 'TAA', 'ICT'.
- B) Implementing weekly, monthly assignments that will be give total score at the end the semester.
- C) To evaluate students' creativity, critical thinking ability in practical way instead of paper-based exams or multiple-choice questions that mainly aim to measure their recall ability
- D) Using CLT, Task-based, Project-based approaches, Case studies rather than teacher-centered methods

The system that functions as an assessment guider is called 'rating system'. This type of assessment aims to enhance competitiveness among learners. However, from my point of view, today **being collaborative** is more important than ever before. I would suggest to develop more friendly atmosphere by engaging students to work cooperatively, not only for their own sake while studying. Moreover, motivating bachelor degree students to be autonomous learners is very crucial nowadays. It would give them more opportunities and more time to put acknowledged theories into practice. It helps them to be **lifelong learners**, as well. Besides these factors, increasing motivation is also one of the main responsibilities of teaching staff. I would suggest to replace theory based assignments with more practical ones. Currents assessments may include creative projects and presentations based on innovative ideas. Implementing **CLT** and **CLL** methods in a classroom might possibly increase productivity of learners by decreasing teacher reliance and attitude of reluctance to accomplish boring and unnecessary tasks (Brown H.D, 2010)³. In the following part, some **project based methods/techniques** (which are suggested to use for n-going assessment) are illustrated to substitute formal exam assignments along with the solid reasons why they are important in this context:

Project –based tasks could be used alternatively to multiple choice or 12 page-length written assignments. Rather than learning only theory, these tasks would allow students to practice with the

acquired knowledge in real life. If an instructor gives various weekly and monthly assignments considering the needs and interests of his/her learners, they would probably get more motivated to study and to be creative. Undoubtedly, it will increase quality of outcome.

Project-based assignments may include case studies, oral presentations (TED TALK like motivational presentations), individual and groups works, technology based assignments (creating tests, modifying teaching materials, publishing articles and presenting them in front of audience), research based works (works well in language history and literature classes), creating web sites (Debski, R. (2006)⁴.

Weekly assignments could include **case studies** which improves their problem solving abilities and higher order thinking competencies. In small groups students would solve some issues related to teaching with the help of theoretical materials they are supplied. Beyond doubt, it increases content-related reliability.

Steps to prepare and select project work assignments for students:

- Allowing learners to select topics
- Setting clear criteria/rubric to assess
- Support learners to succeed in and out of classroom
- Being concerned with individual progress of learners rather than providing shared scores to each member of the group (if it is a group project)
- Select various types of project works: case studies, oral presentations (TED TALK like motivational presentations), individual and groups works, technology based assignments (creating tests, modifying teaching materials, publishing articles and presenting them in front of audience), research based works (works well in language history and literature classes)

After scoring each weekly assignment, instructors are supposed to sum up both weekly and monthly assignment scores to give final score. It is significantly useful way to decrease depression and nervousness during formal final exams. **Stress-free atmosphere** would probably allow learners to demonstrate their real abilities and knowledge. Secondly, students less incline to plagiarize and cheat, as they would have enough time and opportunity to prepare and gain reachable results. It means they are not forced to gain results which seems out-of-reach.

Benefits of project-based assignments:

³ Brown H.D. (2010) "*Language assessment: Principles and Classroom practices*". Pearson

Education. 324 p. ISBN 0-13-098834-0.

⁴ Debski, R. (2006). Internet Use of Polish by Polish Melburnians: Implications for Maintenance and Teaching. *Language Learning & Technology*, 10 (1), Pp 87-109.



- Authenticity-students feel real life experiences to accomplish tasks and unconsciously prepare themselves for future career. In the future, employers require them to demonstrate not their memorized knowledge but show how they are successful in practice.
- Motivation- students have more opportunity to have a voice in selecting meaningful content for their assignments. Besides, they develop communication skills and friendly attitude in group works.
- Metacognition- in BA degree, students should be concerned with more feedbacks and ways to self-develop rather than 'numeral evaluation'. It is true that scoring gives motivation to study better, yet this way it more suitable for primary school learners. in Bachelor degree, students are enough mature to understand to importance of self-development. In this regard, test-designers should be careful to set clear rubrics to evaluate students' abilities and provide useful feedback to help students.
- Collaboration- while accomplishing tasks, learners have one aim which unites them as a one team. Along with enriching their knowledge, they also enhance "soft skills".
- Creativity-students are prepared to solve various problems. As a technology era generation, they tend to find more innovative ways to solve them. Higher order thinking abilities help them to modify teaching methods and modernize teaching techniques in their own way.

an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge.

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KEY TERMS

- Alternative assessment- Performance or authentic assessments which mostly aim to measures applied proficiency rather than knowledge.
- Formative assessment- quizzes and tests that evaluate how someone is learning material throughout a course.
- Summative assessment- quizzes and tests that evaluate how much someone has learned throughout a course.
- CLT- (Communicative Language teaching) teaching approach which focuses on encouraging learners to make meaningful communications and language use in the target language.
- CLL- (Community Language Learning) a language-teaching approach in which learners work collaboratively to improve their language proficiency in the target language.
- Project based approaches- teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills through working together for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to