

## USING PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT TO REDESIGN WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS

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*Abstract:*

This paper reports on a study of undergraduate student's experience with criteria-referenced assessment. It explores three crucial elements of L2 test design: (1) the significance of five central principles of language assessment; (2) the shortcomings of employing only limited production tasks; (3) the significance of applying expanded tasks in assessing students' writing and reading skills. The research is carried out in one of the educational institutions and concludes with the suggestion that the adapted assessment, which incorporates course objectives and principles of language assessment, serves learners to meet their interests and earn a higher grade.

*Key words:* practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, feedback, criteria-referenced assessment.

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Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning practices. Assessment is the process of collecting and discussing information from various sources in order to develop students' current knowledge and understandings and to measure their potential of using gained educational experiences (Brown, 2011). Assessment answers three questions: 1) What expectations do instructors have for student learning? 2) How well do learners' performances meet the expectations? 3) What can teachers do to help pupils learn so that they comply with the requirements? (Bahtiyarova, 2022) On creating language tests, it is vital to consider five primary principles of language assessment, such as practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity. Authenticity is assumed to be a subjective judgement (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Hence, the concept authenticity may vary on the students' current lifestyles and worldview. As Eder (2010) states that it carries relationship between the test and the real world.

The assessment is considered effective when its results generate students' motivation to improve their following learning. This principle involves giving feedback that will be relevant to the objectives of the unit being tested. Feedback is believed to be goal-oriented and meaningful when it includes information regarding proper results, clarification, and specific actions to aid learner enhance learning and work on mistakes (Nyquist, 2003).

One of the tests which entails feedback is criterion-referenced testing. Such model of testing provides test-takers with help and monitor instruction (Shepard, 1991:5). It is perceived as measurement of how well a student has acquired certain skills and course materials. Moreover, it appears to be supportive,

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practical both for student which makes him or her be on track of test specifications and for assessor who has to score following the criteria.

### **Learner Profile**

The learner is 18 years old student of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. For confidentiality purpose, his name changed to Anvar. He is a first-year student of English philology and literature faculty. He has been learning English since the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. His majors were biology and chemistry at school, however, in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, he started to be interested in learning English and decided to enter the Institute of Foreign Languages. It was his second trial to take the State's Entrance Exams that he was enrolled on the basis of super-contract. His score was 120.2 out of 180 points.

During the observation, Anvar was active and diligent in the lessons. He could understand English very well and could express his opinions in any topic. However, while answering the questions, he paused a lot to choose the right word from his memory. While working in the group, he was successful at putting the paragraphs of the text into correct order as he learns IELTS tests individually.

### **The educational setting**

The group where Anvar studies, is a group of super-contracts who did not obtain the State's Entrance Exams' passing points. The questions of State's test center are designated for B2 levels according to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference of Languages). His lessons started in the middle of October whereas, other groups' studies began in September. The students' levels differ from A2 to B1 in that group. As English is his main subject, it is taught according to 6 aspects: Reading and Writing practice, Grammar in context, Vocabulary in context, Integrated Language skills and Independent Study skills. The aspect of Reading and Writing is conducted separately, so if one lesson is reading, the next one is writing. Students practiced writing formal and informal letters, linking sentences, punctuation, arranging texts' paragraphs into right order, moreover, exercised on comparing and evaluating situations, information which are one of the main elements of critical thinking skills.

Norm-referenced assessment is employed while grades of student's class participation may effect on mid-term examination score, if he gets lower score than the marks of class-participation, by adding a point to overall score. Such kind of approach may encourage student's performance. However, nothing influences on the student's final-exam's score from outer factors. It is based on criterion-referenced testing.

### **The most recent test**

The recent achievement test was conducted at the end of first semester. The outcome measured whether the student had achieved the covered material which is addressed the curriculum within a semester period of time. The assessment was paper-based and consists of four tasks with clear instructions. It was allotted one hour and twenty minutes to complete these tasks. The tasks were developed according to the provided material of the semester on Reading and Writing language aspect.

As it was winter semester' final exam, the room where the examination was conducted was cold that my participant had to sit in a coat to accomplish the tasks. The first task was reading a text which followed by matching the words with seven pair words and five true/false questions. These two tasks had tables to put the correct answers.

Next, writing section required writing a letter to given discourse. Test-taker had to follow criteria followed at the end of tasks which referred both to reading and writing tasks.

The implication of this test was relevant for B2 level of language proficiency. As my participant's level is B1, he found it challenging to accomplish the assignment. He got 3 points out of 5 which is considered satisfactory. It was difficult for him to translate the text which had a number of unknown words. Furthermore, it took him long to search for appropriate words and functions of "cassette player" because he was not familiar with that technological device. It would be helpful, if the content of the task corresponded with his age, interest and lifestyle.

### **The critique of the assessment**

The test assessed reading and writing skills. Reading section had 2 tasks: matching up words and true and false questions based on text. Points were allocated as following: 3 points for reading skills; 2 points for writing.

In terms of validity the current assessment is partially valid. The content of the reading task is for B2 level whereas, my participant's level is B1. Moreover, one of the course objectives was promoting critical thinking which was practiced in the lessons. However, the test did not measure this skill. It would be relevant if assessment correlates with course objectives. Writing a letter and true and false tasks were valid because they measure what have been covered within a semester.

Each task was provided by clear instruction which showed the reliability of the test. Nevertheless, it appears to be less fair when no dictionary is allowed during the exam. As Brown (2010) pointed out that "test imposes fear of failure to assessee". Especially, it concerns students who has limited vocabulary as Anvar and also the condition of the room where the assessment was administered. Therefore, while dealing with reading and writing examination, open-book assessment method would give less stress to students like Anvar.

### **The modified version of test**

The test is modified focusing and addressing on my participant's needs and interests and it is improved according course objectives and principles of language assessment.

Taking into consideration the room's condition in wintertime and the students short term period of time study in the Institute comparing to ones who started earlier, the assessment is administered in open-book method. As Brown (2010) noted that "the conditions where the test is conducted may produce unreliability".

The level of the tasks is on B1 in order to correspond with the learner's language proficiency level. The reading section includes reading a text, evaluating or reflecting on the given concept and true or false range of questions. The evaluation and reflection on the concept are elements of critical thinking. By including a question of high order thinking skill, the test is valid according to course objectives. Next, the writing section examines learner's competence on writing a letter. The theme for the letter is chosen and it imitates real-world task. That would help the learner recognize or imagine the situation and react or interpret properly. In order to facilitate writing process, criteria referenced testing is attached to the task which helps to frame student's creativity and beliefs.

**Criteria for assessing a formal letter**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Ratings (This area will be used by the teacher to leave comments related to the criterion)</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Content</b> (relevance to assigned topic, keeping to word limit, following task instructions)		10
<b>Organization</b> (how well the text type followed organization principles, developed logically, presents coherent structure which is defined by good paragraphing and discourse markers)		10
<b>Variety of vocabulary and structure</b> (range of vocabulary, effective word choice and usage, subject/verb agreement, tense, prepositions)		5
<b>Mechanics</b> (spelling, punctuation, capitalization)		5

The detailed criteria could help to evaluate Anvar's achievements within the semester in writing. The open-book assessment has influenced to better performance due to saving time from searching the appropriate word from memory, on writing process. Moreover, it is worth mentioning the authenticity at this point because the authentic theme of the letter which was complaint letter to online shop's manager about a broken smartphone, was helpful on understanding the issue of the asking item and addressing it effectively.

Reading task is chosen neither too difficult nor too simple in order to challenge my participant a little and it was not specified to her learning domain. The topic of the reading text was "Next generation of technology in modern life" that made the learner to make inference and evaluate the role of technology in education and put it down to given question followed by the text. Critical thinking is considered as one of the capacities of global competence and it should be measured in order to plan further steps of cultivating this skill which is valuable skill in future career. True and false task came after this question which was completed sufficiently. The reading tasks were graded separately from the writing task. The question which referred to check the critical thinking ability was measured if the learner could address the question appropriately on 5-point scale.

The modified version of the test was found relevant to my learner's interest and needs. It enabled him to get 9,5 out of 10 in these tasks. The provided feedback could guide Anvar to understand his mistakes and take further works on it.

**Conclusion**

The assessment should not serve to judge student's performance but measure his or her ability and help to adapt, customize teaching material. However, teachers have to make sure that the assessing tasks are valid and reliable. It would be beneficial if they examine sources and take advice of experts to plan the assessment suitably.

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