Working Papers on
Linguistics
and Literature
(UGC Recognized Listed Journal)

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS
BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY
Coimbatore - 641 046, India

Working Papers on

Linguistics and Literature

(UGC Recognized Listed Journal)

(Dr. T. Muthukrishnan's Festschrift)

Chief Editors

Dr. V.M. Subramanian

Dr. S. Sundarabalu

Editors

Dr. N. Ramesh

Dr. N. Vijayan

Dr. P. Sankarganesh

Working Papers on Linguistics and Literature

(UGC Recognized Listed Journal)

(Dr. T. Muthukrishnan's Festschrift)

Vol. XII - No. 1   2018

Contents

TESTS, THE NEED OF THE HOUR IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

S. Bhuvaneswari

Assistant Professor of English, Sourashtra College
Vilachery Main Road, Madurai

Abstract

Testing is a very component in language teaching. Tests can give students a sense of accomplishment as well as information about what they know and what they need to review. Tests also give teachers valuable information on how to improve the process of evaluation. A test can give the teacher valuable information about where the students are in their learning and can suggest what the teacher will cover next. It will help a teacher to decide if her teaching has been effective and will help to highlight what needs to be reviewed. Testing can be as much an assessment of the teaching as the learning. Language abilities are not easy to measure. This paper titled, "Tests, the Need of the Hour in Language Teaching" highlights how tests have become the need of the hour in language teaching.

Keywords: Tests, evaluation, teachers, language

Tests, The Need of the Hour in Language Teaching

Tests form important instruments in the nation's education and training framework. They should not just measure achievement and provide assurance that someone has met the required standard; tests also influence classroom practice. If they are well-constructed, they promote effective learning, help to identify learning needs and inform the planning and delivery of teaching. A language teaching course is always designed with some course objectives. Some kind of feedback and testing is essential to confirm that the objectives of the course have been successfully achieved. Testing is the final and very important part of any language course and has to be taken seriously. This paper titled "Tests, the Need of the Hour in Language Teaching" highlights the need and the importance of tests in language teaching.

Teachers need assessment of their students to be carried out so that they can get an idea of how far their teaching has been successful. Tests are a common yardstick which enables meaningful comparison of individual students and groups. People's language ability can be evaluated in several ways. Testing is only one form of assessment, and there are other methods as well. Assessments are of two types- Formative assessment and Summative assessment. When teachers use assessment to check out on the progress of the students, to see how far they have achieved and what they ought to, and use this information to modify future teaching plans and techniques, it is called Formative assessment. Such assessment can also be the basis for feedback to the students. Formative assessment can also be done with the help of quizzes, games, simple tasks or mere observation. Summative assessment is used at the end of the term or semester or year in order to measure what has been achieved by individuals as well as

groups. The tests are formal. Summative assessment gives a complete view of the teaching learning activities conducted throughout the course. It helps to understand how far the course has been successful and the objectives of the course be fulfilled.

The purpose of testing in every situation must be clearly defined. Different purposes would usually require different kinds of tests. The different purposes of testing are listed below:

- To measure general language proficiency

- To discover how successful students have been in achieving the objectives of a course

- To diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of students

- To assist placement of students by identifying the stage or part of a teaching programme most appropriate for them and according to their ability.

Validity, Reliability and Practicality are the qualities of a good test. Inorder to test language abilities and skills, Tests are categorized into several types. Here are few of them:

Achievement Test

An Achievement Test also referred to as attainment or summative test are devised to measure how much of a language someone has learned with reference to a particular course of study or programme of instruction. Achievement tests are of two kinds- progress achievement tests and final achievement tests. Final achievement tests are administered at the end of a course of study. They may be administered by examination boards or members of other teaching institutions. The content of these courses must be related to the courses that are concerned. This is called the syllabus-content approach. It is a fair test since the test contains only what is taught in the class, what students have already encountered. The disadvantage is that if the course is badly designed or if the books and materials used are not properly chosen, the results can be misleading. Progressive achievement tests are designed to test the progress that students are making during the implementation of the course. Progress is towards the achievement of course objectives. A series of well-defined short termed objectives is planned. These make a clear progress towards the final achievement of objectives.

Diagnostic Tests

As its name denotes, a diagnostic test is primarily designed to diagnose some particular linguistic aspects. Diagnostic tests in pronunciation, for example might have the purpose of determining which particular phonological features of the English language are more likely to pose problems and difficulties for a group of learners. These tests enable a teacher to decide whether to continue with the existing teaching method or to change it. They are extremely useful for individualistic instruction or self-instruction.

Proficiency Tests

A proficiency test is devised to measure how much of a language someone has learned. They are designed to measure general language abilities regardless of any training they may

have had in that language. Most English language proficiency tests base their testing items on high frequency-count vocabulary and general basic grammar. Some proficiency tests have been standardized for worldwide use, such as the TOEFL and the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) which are used to measure the English language proficiency of foreign students.

Placement Tests

Placement Tests, as the name suggests, are intended to provide information that will help to place students at the stage of the teaching programme most appropriate to their abilities. The term "placement test" as Richards et al (1989) note does not refer to what a test contains or how it is constructed, but to the purpose for which it is used. Dictation, interview or a grammar test can be used for placement purposes.

Communicative Language Testing

This tests the integration of all language skills. This is most difficult to bring reliability and validity in communicative testing. Efforts are needed in this direction to develop appropriate testing facility.

Tests prove to be perfect tools for evaluation if they are constructed by teachers who actually deal with the students in the class. Every teaching learning situation is unique and students and the concerned teacher are very much a part of it. Hence, Test construction should be the job of the teacher. Teachers must be trained how to prepare test that are related to the objectives of the course, what kind of questions are the best for the different aspects of language like grammar, vocabulary etc, the marking scheme and so on. This training will enable the teachers to prepare surprise tests, test based on small units, class tests etc. without having to rely on examination councils and its complex machinery.

In a language teaching, the teacher can test the students in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Testing Listening

Testing listening is difficult because of the transient nature of speech. One can go backwards and forwards any number of times in a written text. But this is not possible while listening. Sometimes the listener wants to concentrate but noise and shouts may cause problems. If he is mentally disturbed, he may not be able to concentrate.

The teachers should concentrate on the following operations in listening while designing tests:

Students must be able to obtain the gist.

Students must be able to follow instructions, interpret intonation patterns, understand stress patterns. Listening can be tested by allowing the students to listen to audio recorders and asking them questions inbetween.

Testing Speaking

Oral ability can be assessed through interview, interaction with peers, and responses through audio or video recorded stimuli. Students can participate in group discussions, role plays and debates organized by the teachers. The pronunciation, appropriateness, range of words and constructions of the speaker are to be tested.

Testing Reading

Reading is generally tested through passages which students read. The students are required to answer the questions that follow. For reading, advertisements from newspapers, prose passages, poems and dialogues can be provided to the students. A time limit should be set so that the speed of the reading can be tested. While reading the pronunciation, the pause, stress and the intonation are to be tested.

Testing Writing

Writing can be tested by asking the students to write an essay on their own for the given topic, write reports, letters, prepare advertisements and giving a situation and asking them to write a dialogue. The students' grammar and vocabulary can be tested though these tests.

A test can give the teacher valuable information about where the students are in their learning and can suggest what the teacher will cover next. They will help a teacher to decide if her teaching has been effective and help to highlight what needs to be reviewed. Testing can be as much an assessment of the teaching as the learning. Tests are also a learning opportunity after they have been taken. The feedback after a test can be invaluable in helping a student to understand something she couldn't do during the test. Language abilities are not easy to measure. A level of accuracy cannot be achieved comparable to those of Science. Thus the conduct of the tests and exams are the need of the hour in evaluating the progress of the students and to check how far the teaching is successful.

Works Cited

Adewuyi, J.O. and Oluokun, O. *Introduction to Test & Measurement in Education*. Oyo: Odumatt Press and Publishers. 2001. Print.

Williams, D. *English Language Teaching*. Ibadan. Spectrum Book Limited. 1990. Print.

Working Papers on
Linguistics
and Literature
(UGC Recognized Listed Journal)

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS
BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY
Coimbatore - 641 046, India