Using Traditional Assessment in the Foreign Language Teaching: Advantages and Limitations

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ABSTRACT

The article seeks to compare traditional assessment procedures (such as multiple choice tests) with performance or alternative assessments. The descriptive analysis method was used to express the effectiveness of traditional assessment and its advantages, limitations as well. The assessment types and statements by researchers, and controversial questions are analyzed and compared. The article describes some essential issues of using traditional and authentic assessment types. Furthermore, the article suggests some ways and techniques of using other type of assessment that can be effective in the foreign language teaching process. The author concludes that the types of assessment should be selected according to the content of the program and should be content related.

KEYWORDS: *alternative assessment; education; evaluation in teaching; foreign language; multiple choice test; techniques; traditional assessment*

INTRODUCTION

Educational assessment can help to improve learners' achievement in the foreign language learning, and the practice of teaching. Assessment is changing for many reasons. Changes in the skills and knowledge needed for success and in relationship between assessment and instruction necessitated the change in assessment strategies. People within the educational community: educators, students, parents, administrators, have different ideas regarding the implementation of assessment strategies [5]. Some people believe that traditional assessment methods are more effective than other types of assessment. However, others think that alternative assessment tools are superior. For example, Oloruntegbe and Omoifo noted that teachers teach and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes [10, 35-44]. Consequently, stakeholders in education have started to recognize that minimums and basics are not sufficient enough and they call for a closer match between the skills that students learn in schools and the skills they need upon leaving school [15]. However, Law and Eckes believe that for validity and reliability reasons, teachers should consider and use traditional assessment [7]. This controversial question has been an issue to teachers on which assessment strategy to employ in assessing learners' foreign language skills and knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As Cowie and Bell note that in the education process, assessment has a major impact to inform and improve ongoing learning, and plays a significant role [4, 101-116].

Also, Pierce states that assessment is a crucial part of any learning and teaching activity. Assessment informs instructional decisions made on a daily basis and helps control student's strengths and weaknesses related to classroom instruction, and provides specific feedback to students to support in their learning. Moreover, assessment can provide immediate feedback for foreign language teachers to shape their teaching practices according to the learning styles of their students. It is important for teachers to use various types of tests and methods for student achievement and determine grades. As it can be clear that tests, examinations and evaluation models are important tools that are considered as a measure of the learning process.

Traditional assessment is the conventional methods of checking students' knowledge usually produces written document in the form of quizzes, multiple choice tests or exams. Standardized test, most state achievement tests are also examples of traditional assessment. These tests are given to students by teachers to measure how much the students have learned after completing of a course or a module. One of the most widely used traditional assessment tools are in the following: multiple choice tests, true/false tests, short answers, and essays. Multiple choice tests involve items which consist of one or more introductory sentences followed by two or more suggested responses. These kinds of tests are commonly employed by teachers, at schools, at higher education institutions and assessment

organizations because they are economical, objective and easily scored [2]. True/false items demand students to think and find out which of two (3 or 4) potential responses is true. These items are usually easy to score and administer.

However, Simonson states that guessing may increase the chance of success by 50% [13]. In short-answer test, items are written either as a direct question requiring the learner to fill in a word or phrase or as statements in which a space has been left blank for a brief written answer [13, 270]. Also, essays are effective assessment tools as the questions are flexible and assess the higher order learning skills. However, they are not very practical due to the fact that it is very difficult and time consuming to score the essays or written assignments. Moreover, subjectivity might be an issue in scoring [13].

METHODOLOGY

Elliott distinguishes two major concepts that describe assessment: 1) Performance assessment that is a student's active generation of a response, and it can be observable either directly or indirectly via a permanent product; 2) Authentic assessment that is the nature of the task and context in which the assessment occurs is relevant and represents problems or issues that are true to life or real life situations [6]. Forms of essay tests come in the form of performance-based assessment but there are other assignments such as experiments in science, writing speeches, editing letter, conducting surveys. From Bailey's point of view, traditional assessments are mostly standardized [2]. Law and Eckes note that most standardized tests assess only the lower-order thinking skills of the learner [7].

For this reason, Simonson argued that traditional assessment mostly focus on learner's ability of recall that are lower level of cognitive skills [13]. Moreover, Brualdi made some additions that traditional assessment tools require learners to display their knowledge in a predetermined way [3, 1-19]. Traditional assessments are classroom based and often assess higher order thinking skills of the learners [8]. Therefore, students who are learning the foreign language can have the opportunity to demonstrate what they learned in hands-on activities that they are engaged. Bailey says that traditional assessments are indirect and inauthentic [2]. Also, he adds that traditional assessment is mostly speed-based, and norm-referenced. In addition to Bailey's opinion, Law and Eckes state that traditional assessments are single-occasion tests as they measure what learners can do at a particular time [7].

However, test scores may not show the progress the learner is making. As a result, they cannot tell what challenges the students faced during the test. Bailey also mentions that in traditional assessment there is not a feedback provided to learners [2]. However, in performance assessment feedback will be provided to learners and are mostly group-based and contextualized. Winking says that this is clear as the progress and growth of the student is known, and as a result the instructors get to have a comprehensive view of student learning [15]. Also, according to Niguidila, unlike traditional assessments which focuses on students' scores, performance assessments look at students' product that could provide teachers with insight regarding learners' knowledge and abilities [9].

When it comes to alternative assessments, foreign language teachers can identify what is important in their teaching process and select assessment strategies suitable for the characteristics of the learners. Organizing principles of assessment develops the planning of assessment of the foreign language. Thus, the following issues should be taken into account by the language teacher especially in the planning of teaching foreign languages regarding the assessment: a) Instruction and assessment should be related to one another; b) All kinds of assessments should be meaningful in using the foreign language; c) Assessment should have a primary place in teaching; d) Assessment principles should be put into consideration in order to develop teaching materials by the teachers for the students to use; e) Harmful factors that affect language learners such as anxiety should be the on the focus of attention by the teacher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As Law and Ecke mention that alternative assessments can be laborious in terms of time and energy spent by the teacher [7]. Diversity of materials in portfolios that are viewed as one of the most important strengths might cause problems for the teachers in terms of practicality [2]. They might be difficult to score and time consuming to evaluate the learner's performance [13]. In addition to this, Reeves claims that unlike multiple choice tests that are practical to score, performance assessments can be considered quite time consuming especially in grading students' knowledge [11, 100-112].

The traditional forms of assessment can be calculated using machine, the alternative form of assessment relies on human judgment, and especially it depends on the teacher's evaluation and analysis. Thus, it can be assumed that traditional assessments have no positive characteristics at all. However, there are merits of traditional tests just like alternative tests. Traditional assessment strategies are more objective, reliable and valid. For instance, standardized tests and other types of multiple choice tests can be real samples [7].

On the other hand, alternative assessments can carry some concerns in terms of subjectivity, reliability and validity. Bailey agrees with Law and Ecke's assertion about the reliability issues in alternative assessment and questions its validity [2]. Bailey claims that the wide variety of student products might cause reliability problems presuming portfolio assessment as an example. However, Simonson notes that proponents of alternative assessment (performance assessment) suggest that the content validity of authentic tasks is ensured because there is a direct link between the expected behaviour and the ultimate goal of skill/learning transfer [13, 275]. It should be taken into account that regardless of the advantages and the disadvantage of each form of assessment procedure, the purpose of the assessment should be paramount in making a decision to use one form and not the other forms.

In some subjects knowledge and skills to be assessed only requires the use of traditional assessment procedures, others require the use of alternative assessment procedures like portfolio and task performance. In higher education institutions, for example, portfolio and performance assessments are emphasized more than traditional assessment especially in the foreign language teaching. It should be mentioned that it is essential for traditional assessment procedures to be used to assess whether learners can remember facts and knowledge learnt before

alternative assessment is used. However, we presume that traditional assessment could not be disregarded for several of reasons in the following: increasing enrollment of students across all the levels of education, inadequate teachers, insufficient teaching materials, not enough time for teaching and learning, among others are some of the great challenges to the use of alternative assessment. For this reason, it is important for language teachers to employ the form of assessment procedure (whether traditional or alternative) that are effective to achieve the learning objectives.

Thus, the significance of assessment in the process of foreign language teaching has been known recently. Assessment is vitally important for the language learners to acquire the target language since it plays a crucial role in the process of foreign language learning.

CONCLUSION

Thus, after analyzing some opinions stated by the scientists and methodologists, we can conclude that assessment and evaluation are the main parts of teaching and learning activities. They have close definitions and they are mostly used in different ways. However, they may differ from each other to some extent. Assessment consists of methods and techniques used to gather information about student skills, knowledge understanding and motivation [1, 19-20]. Evaluation is the activity of collecting important information to determine if a curriculum program reaches its goals. It aims to discover which methods work and which are not helpful in the teaching process. As we can see from these definitions, assessment is the method, and evaluation is the process. Also, it can be inferred from this that one can apply assessment methods in the evaluation process. Taras states that assessment is accepted as one of the very crucial parts of teaching, by this means, educators will be able to determine the level of skills or knowledge of their students [14]. Wojtczak, argues that it helps teachers evaluate the strengths and weakness of their students and to encourage them [16]. At the same time, assessments also provide teachers with useful feedback about student learning acquisition [14, 466-478].

In the foreign language teaching and learning assessments are performed for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it reveals how many students have achieved their learning objectives in a foreign language, who has any difficulties or problems with their learning, and which techniques are useful in teaching a foreign language. Secondly, the language teacher can decide whether or not to continue the foreign language teaching program or the course. Testing assessments might be helpful for both teachers and students with information about the level of knowledge, skills, difficulties in foreign language learning, and identify what kind of materials, activities and methods are the most effective. Testing as a means of evaluation of student activities can be used to get clear criterion.

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