

“RESEARCH-BASED TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION: TRADITION AS A BASIS FOR INNOVATION”

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THE SYSTEM OF COMPILING TESTS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY FACULTY STUDENT’S READING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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While teaching any foreign language in any type of education system there appears a necessity to evaluate students’ language skills for various purposes as to identify language level for choosing appropriate teaching materials, to check the level of material perception by the students etc. Therefore, assessment is the system of collection and evaluation of certain information to improve students’ knowledge and to choose appropriate teaching method. Literate assessment and application of correct testing system helps not only teachers to identify the point where students have stopped but also make students learn while fulfilling various quizzes.

According to assessment system, tests compilation is subdivided into standardized evaluation system and the system that is compiled by teachers themselves.

First, one is based on the international standards of evaluation, particularly in our country it is CEFR standard adapted to the national context. The types of standardized tests are goal-oriented ones. For instance:

— Classroom oriented assessment that helps teachers to assess student’s knowledge in the content covered at the lesson. They can be of different types and teacher chooses the best type according to the university curriculum, to the topic they cover and to students’ weak or strong points;

— Institutional, college or any program assessment that is generally designed for choosing the best candidates for the educational system. They are quite extended and cover all the material that the program requires to give;

— Large-scale, standardized assessment as IELTS, PTE, CEFR, TOEFL etc.

All the standardized tests are based on certain criteria oriented to certain language norms. The institutions and universities usually globally recognize scores of the large-scale tests. The benefits of applying a standardized test at English classes are that it economizes teacher’s time for preparation for the lesson, it is goal-oriented and curriculum based.

Despite standardized testing system, there exists a teacher-compiling system. There are some aspects an instructor should take into consideration while compiling

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these assessment tasks [5]. The benefits when teachers themselves make assessment tasks are as follows:

- They have a great awareness of their students’ needs;
- Teachers know the learning objectives quite well and they are trying to help their students to achieve;
- They are aware of what students have already experienced in the testing system and what topics they have already covered;
- They observe students while performing the task and discuss their performances;
- Teachers have an experience working with particular students and can compile tests that are more valid and get reliable results.

However, designing the assessment tasks a teacher should be aware of students’ needs, their age, culture, the way they need to perceive the language. Moreover, it is suggested while working with tests systematically considering questions, as whether the tasks match important learning objectives; whether students are motivated to study harder before doing the tests; whether the test is adapted to students’ English level, whether the assessment encourage or discourage creativity both of teachers and students.

Another way to classify the assessment tasks as traditional and non-traditional pedagogical ones. G. Fisher used first traditional testing system in 1864 in Great Britain. He compiled the book containing certain questions and several answers on them. In traditional pedagogical tests students are to perform the same tasks within one period in similar circumstances and the same evaluation. Non-traditional pedagogical tests are integrated, adaptive, criteria-oriented, and norm-oriented ones. Integrated tests aimed at general assessment of students’ ability about the language and the readiness to communicate contain number of tasks that meet the requirements of integrated content, test form, increasing tasks difficulty. Adaptive test is an assessment system that takes into consideration beforehand the language complexity level. The aim of this test type is to find out what students already know, what weak points they have and what material they perceive better [4].

However, the most suitable assessment tasks are the tasks that are norm-oriented. i.e. based on the certain criteria what students should know at the moment of assessment.

According to N.F. Efremova the main assessment functions are diagnostic, control and evaluation, educational, developing, motivational, teaching,

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organizational, standardizing, informative, managing, democratizing, social and economic, humanistic [3].

It is important to note that a set of compiled test items must meet the requirements and quality of the test. In the methodology, there are some criteria for controlling the test quality. They are validity, reliability, differential ability, practicality and cost effectiveness.

Validity is appropriateness and adequacy of the compiled tasks with regard to a particular use, to a particular purpose. For example, the tasks on reading comprehension assessment should score particularly reading skills. To make tests valid teachers should decide what types of tasks they would use as multiple choices, filling the gaps, open-ended questions etc. Then, it is essential to compare the scores of different groups of students and compare the scores before and after some particular learning experience of each group, correlating the scores with other measures.

Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results. If we have similar score obtained from the same students fulfilling the same tasks in various occasions, so we can conclude that our test results have a high degree of reliability from one occasion to another. Another example is that two different teachers assess students' performance at the assessment tasks and get approximately similar results so the test have a high degree of reliability.

While test compiling a teacher should take into consideration Differential ability. That means that it is important to compile assessment material according to students' level, depending on their cultural differences, interests, and their specification. For example, test for “Psychology” faculty should vary because it is content-based. Moreover, assessment material should be practical and cost effective, i.e. containing only relevant information, neatly printed and be visibly adaptable to do them [1,2].

While teaching ESP teachers, basically, work with texts on students' vocational topics. Therefore, first to start working with texts teachers should identify the reading comprehension skills in order to provide students with appropriate and suitable materials during the whole course. On the contrary, quite often teachers have to work with certain materials the curriculum provides, particularly in this situation knowing the level of students' reading comprehension skills can help learners to adapt to the program successfully by giving certain tasks or if the texts are too easy for the learners, use additional materials.

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To assess reading process different techniques can be used as standardized tests, content reading inventory, oral language observations, and student interviews. Teachers can rely on standardized reading test, they can be paper and pencil test or may be online tests, where students are asked to complete a range of reading tasks. Standardized tests ease teachers' work and it takes less effort to score and evaluate them. Nevertheless, some researchers claim that reading assessment should be grounded in classroom practices. They call these types of tests authentic ones. Authentic tests could be rather advantageous than standardized ones. One of the advantages is that tasks completed during the lesson are closely connected with the testing tasks, as teachers know weak points of their students and try to improve their knowledge during the learning process. Another advantage is that authentic tests contain more variety of tasks particularly they contain more open-ended tasks to check how students can express their ideas. The tasks can be as following:

- Summarize what they have read;
- Prepare question to the passage they have read;
- Write appropriate solution to the problem described in the text.

Standardized tests are also known as norm-oriented tests. In reading standardized tests there is a consistent format. For example, students read a short passage and answer the questions, or are asked to define the word from the context. The disadvantages of standardized tests are that they are often overestimated concerning students' knowledge. There is little students' development working with tests. The relationship between test questions and what should be assessed is not always clear. For assessment that is more reliable teachers should compare tests results with the results of their own assessment. Robert L. Linn and Norman E. Gronlund in their book “Measurement and assessment in Teaching” for assessment reading suggest using an Informal Reading Inventory — “an individually administered survey designed to help you determine a student's reading instructional needs” [8]. This assessment instrument is used when the instructor needs to have deep information on a student's reading process or verifying individual particular student's needs and strength. Informal reading inventories are used to help those students who need special help in reading. The benefits of using IRI at reading classes are there is possibility to get deep understanding about reading ability of each student. Moreover, teachers know the way to collect information about student's reading skill over the certain period, how to use grade level to assess students, how to evaluate what students need to progress to the next level of reading development. Independent reading inventory evaluates the following:

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- Students’ background knowledge, whether they use their background to understand the texts or not. The evaluation can be in the form of questionnaires.
- Language knowledge as terminology, professional phrases, references, and syntax;
 - The evaluation can be in the form of analyses and tasks for understanding the certain information from the text;
 - Through the procedure, such as running records analysis teachers can decode students’ ability to use the words and to check whether they understand the context;
 - Any type of test system that reveals students’ ability to use appropriate vocabulary in speaking, reading and writing;
 - To check students’ ability to comprehend at different levels, including independent, instructional levels. All the formal and informal techniques could be used.

Informal reading inventory includes set of texts and comprehension checking task ranking in order according to the complexity. Students start reading easy texts if it is not challenging for them and they can read higher language level text. As students read aloud, then they orally answer the questions and summarize the text. A teacher may record their performance. It is also possible for students to read the passage silently and then do other tasks orally. To start with easy text and gradually day by day going to more complicated tasks and make students overcome difficulties, build new vocabulary and improve reading comprehension skill as well as speaking one. This type of work helps a teacher to choose particular reading strategy and identify potential students’ needs. After recording all the students’ performance from the easiest up to the most difficult texts, teacher can analyze

students’ reading comprehension development. Analyzing all parts of activities, the teacher can identify where the students have weak points and where they benefit from the course. Furthermore, the teacher can analyze how students perceive new vocabulary, whether students understand the words by the content or they use the dictionary.

Based on the results of Independent reading inventory an instructor can develop reading strategy that helps students to become more competent in reading (i.e. have more experience in reading and more skillful to perform various reading tasks). The teacher may discuss in mini-groups students’ strong points in reading and suggest them to improve their weak ones. Developing independent reading inventories take some period, but it really makes students develop their reading capabilities. Published independent reading inventories show you the number of missed comprehension

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questions and therefore indicate students’ level. Despite prepared level, verification teachers are suggested to judge students’ performance as well, because personal judgment can be more accurate because it is related to the close contact with students. Comprehension is evaluated according to students’ ability to answer the questions and to summarize it. Informal reading inventory may contain word list related to each passage and pre-reading activity in the form of “concept” questions [7].

A variety of Independent reading inventory is a Content Area Reading Inventory (CARI) that is usually consist of three sections and aimed at checking students’ reading comprehension and awareness of the topic. Section 1 addresses the items concerning the reader’s background knowledge and metacognition. Students answer all the questions before they read the text. As they read a brief passage from their subject-matter text, students are to complete the following sections. Section 2 is a text comprehension section. It contains questions according to the content or some terms they need to understand while reading. Section 3 is directed to the reader’s ability to respond to some situations containing. Students are expected to communicate with their group mates, and communicate in written form as well. Furthermore, section 3 can contain some instructions students are to follow. A sample of a content area-reading inventory:

Teaching ESP students in the field of Psychology the CARI can be compiled on the texts they cover during the course. Using your background knowledge on the topic “What is the difference between psychologist and psychiatrist?” and reading experience answer each of the following questions.

1. Define the word “psychology” and provide the examples of any related words or phrases.

2. What is the root of words “psychologist” and “psychiatrist”. Provide the definitions.

3. How do the words “psychologist” and “psychiatrist” come into the language?

4. What borrowed words do you know and use them in native language?

Some tips for compiling and applying CARI at the lessons.

1. Choose a passage from the course book (not more than 4–5 pages); the text should be neither too difficult nor to easy.

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2. Plan to write about 25 questions for the inventory Section 1 and section 2 about 10 questions and section 3–5 questions relatively.

3. Compile an answer key for you to check. Making answer key beforehand helps teachers strictly stick to the topic and do not give vague questions.

4. To construct questions for the Section 1 focus on experiences and knowledge that will probable help students to understand the text better.

5. Metacognition questions reveal reading-related problems or any challenges and ask students they would react as a response.

6. While designing section 2 questions teacher should take into consideration essential keywords and terms students might not understand or they should learn through the context.

7. Explain the purposes of inventory to your students.

8. Have section 1 completed before students read the text passage. As they read section 2 and after the reading section 3 relatively.

9. Scores from the CARI can be analyzed in different ways, as overall percent of correct responses, or for further teaching and planning the lessons each section separately, to reveal problems students have within every section.

There are some challenges for teachers to compile CARI. One of them is adequately experience in designing this kind of tasks. The assessment can be quite subjective especially in Section 1 and 3. Oral Language Observation is an authentic form of assessment reading skill aimed at checking the way students are able to express their own opinion on what they have read, or summarize the text [7]. Tasks that can be suggested to be fulfilled by the students in oral language observations are as follows:

- To summarize the important points;
- To repeat certain text directions to your partner;
- To ask each other question according to the text;
- To give your own ideas concerning topic covered in the passage.

Students may be shy to answer in front of the whole group so it is suggested using pair work, or mini-work groups to develop the communicative competence.

Student Interview is a type of assessment in the close-to-authentic atmosphere aimed at checking students’ ability to interact with each other and use communicative skills. Students after they read the text should compile a questionnaire according to the context. In the form of a role-play as an example, it can be a newspaper interview. Students go around the class and interview others to check their test comprehension. At my lessons, they should get an interview at least from three students from this

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group. Problem that is usually arise during this type of assessment is that due to some mistakes students make while compiling questions there could be misunderstanding and as the result wrong answers may be given by interviewees. At my lessons before the interviewers start their job I check all the questions they compile. In this type of assessment, you cover the whole group as you evaluate both interviewers and interviewees.

To clarify when to apply the testing system at the beginning of the course, in the middle or at the end, there exist various assessment types as: Proficiency assessment; Diagnostic/ formative assessment; Placement assessment; Achievement or summative assessment.

Proficiency tests assess general knowledge of the target language and culture. This test reveals what knowledge students have about the language what topics they may have covered before performing the assessment tasks.

Diagnostic tests they provide teachers with the information about students' strength and weaknesses in the target language. Moreover, the teacher gets the information on what further teaching is necessary and what problems students might have coping with the instructions.

Placement tests provide teachers with information that helps to put students at the most suitable stage of the teaching curriculum, taking into consideration students' level of the language achieved so far.

Achievement / summative test is aimed at judgment upon the success of individual learners and a group as a whole. It is conducted at the end of a course [6].

Test is quite specific and content based. While designing assessment tasks for checking students' reading comprehension skill the teacher should be aware of some criteria. There should be three types of tasks taking into consideration types of reading as scanning, skimming, extensive or intensive reading. The first task usually evaluates the general comprehension of the reading passage.

The second one assesses more specific parts of the text and it evaluates the content itself as well. The third task verifies the ability to understand detailed text content. The test should be limited in time. For every task maximum 10 minutes are given. Total amount of time limit is 30 minutes. Test should be designed according to the students' level of a target language.

At nonlinguistic universities, but professional oriented ones, English level of first-year students is expected to be B1. At the beginning of a course, it is important to understand what reading level students have and there is the reason why teachers should compile tests to check the real students' language knowledge particular

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checking reading comprehension skills. The placement reading tests for example should be based on the goals and aims teachers are to achieve at the end of the course to make valid and reliable analyses of obtained knowledge. B1 students in reading sections should be able to understand the text on subjects related to their interests contain high frequency every day and vacation-related language. They can recognize significant points in articles on familiar subjects and can easily understand the instructions and understand the description of feelings and wishes.

According to the reading test results 80 percent of students performed on the tests well that corresponds to the educational standard requirements of having B1 level. The problem students had with the task where they should summarized the text. In addition, it demonstrates us that at the beginning of ESP course new coming students do not have the ability to summarize the text, to make their own conclusions, but they are expected to do it at the end of ESP course.

In conclusion, test compiling is a quite challenging process that demands teachers' time, certain test designing experience and the knowledge concerning the test types and the techniques that can be applied during the whole course. For example, at the beginning of a course to identify students' level, a teacher may use Proficiency test or Placement test. During the course to check what students have already learned and what they still need to study, and at the end of the course to clarify what they have already learned as Achievement test. Additionally, some reading techniques can be used to evaluate students' reading skills as reading inventory, oral language observations, and student interviews. To control test quality validity, reliability, differential ability, practicality and cost effectiveness factors should be taken into consideration. All that criteria types were particularly described in the article. Everything mentioned in the paper is also proved by author's own examples taken from the assessment results carried out with Psychology faculty students. Overall, using reliable and valid assessment system helps the learning process become consistent, full and accomplished to make learning process fruitful for both teachers and students.

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