

SOME WAYS OF ASSESSING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract: The article deals with the assessment tools and procedures that is essential for evaluating students' progress and achievement. The article about assessment specifications of PRESETT (Pre-service English Teachers Training) Program. The aim of the PRESETT Curriculum is to prepare teachers of English who are competent in language referred to international standards and modern methodology and to encourage communicative and professional skills rather than pure knowledge and to help learners to build these skills.

Key words: Assessment tools, standards, PRESETT (Pre-service English Teachers Training), Language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking), curriculum.

Uzbekistan's policy of openness, active entry into the global market, expansion of international cooperation in all areas increase the need for studying foreign languages, and nowadays the English language is being used widely in Uzbekistan. "The time has come to create in Uzbekistan a new system of teaching foreign languages, which will become a solid foundation for the future. Since we set ourselves the goal of building a competitive state, from now on, graduates of schools, lyceums, colleges and universities must be fluent in at least two foreign languages. This strict requirement should become the main criterion for the work of the head of each education institution" [1], pointed Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan at a meeting on measures to improve the system of teaching foreign languages conducted on May 6, 2021. We can see that further development of foreign languages learning at all levels of education improving teaching skills and provision of modern teaching materials and assessment specifications are required. And they should be developed according to the needs, interests of our learners, their peculiar characteristics. Teachers know that they should be able to not only give knowledge and but also assess their students' achievements with appropriate assessment tools and forms.

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public. Teachers should be able to set appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality by systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards. In all academic settings, assessment is needed to help teachers and administrators make decisions about students' linguistic abilities, their placement in appropriate levels,

and their achievements. The success of any assessment depends on the effective selection and use of appropriate tools and procedures as well as on the proper interpretation of students' performance[2; 14]. Assessment tools and procedures, in addition to being essential for evaluating students' progress and achievement, also help in evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of the curriculum, the teaching methodology, and the instructional materials.

In the presented article we would like to write about assessment specifications of PRESETT (Pre-service English Teachers Training) Program, which has been implemented in Uzbekistan higher education system since 2012. The aim of the PRESETT Curriculum is to prepare teachers of English who are competent in language referred to international standards and modern methodology and to encourage communicative and professional skills rather than pure knowledge and to help learners to build these skills. The program attempts to develop the following skills in learners: Reading, reasoning, analytical thinking, logical thinking, listening, presentation skills, speaking, time management, social responsibility, ICT skills, critical thinking, research skills, creativity, problem solving, writing, decision making, listening, leadership, planning, comprehension checking, communication skills, linking the stages of a lesson, flexibility, intercultural awareness, self-assessment skills, interpersonal skills.

Each subject in PreSETT program has its own assessment specifications, according to which future teachers' knowledge and skills are evaluated. The curriculum seeks to meet its aim through two strands, language strand and methodology strand. In their first and second years the students develop mostly their language skills and accordingly the curriculum first of all assess students' language skills (5 skills with reference to CEFR):

- Listening
- Reading
- Writing
- Spoken interaction
- Spoken production

The competences that underpin these skills:

- Linguistic competence (grammar, lexis etc)
- Pragmatic competence (functional uses of language)
- Sociolinguistic competence (norms of language use in a range of contexts and settings)

Below, we are going to analyse assessment specifications of two subjects "Listening and Speaking" and "Reading" which assess students' language

skills. For the final assessment on the Listening and Speaking course students will have to act a role play in groups of 2-3 for 10 minutes. Each group should receive a separate role card where the situation and the roles will be described. Students will have 15 minutes for preparation. The role plays should be based on the topics covered during the semester and require conducting informal and semi-formal conversation. Students' performance will be assessed based on the following criteria: fluency, turn taking, asking and answering questions and style.

Another type of assessment in this subject is discussion. The discussion might be based on a film or an audio recording. While listening teacher can ask students to take notes focusing on the main idea of the recording (e.g. summarise the message/content of the recording in 150 words), specific information (e.g. note the names of the characters, where they are from, their job, relations etc.). Students can submit their notes for assessment. It is better if teacher chooses one or two volunteers to be facilitators who would make sure the discussion goes well and each of the students could contribute. Based on the film or the audio recording teacher can give out several questions to the facilitator as a guidance. Assessment will be based on the students' notes and on listening and performance during the discussion. Criteria for assessment: ability to listen and understand the main idea of the recording, ability to catch specific information from the recording, ability to express his/her opinion and justify the reason and fluency[4;5].

In order to assess learners' reading skills there suggested to fulfil several tasks based on their reading over the semester as a part of continuous assessment. As an example we'd like to evaluate three reading logs, which are valuable in assessing students' reading skills.

Reading log 1, where students will have to write a reflective paragraph (no less than 100 words) addressing the following issues:

- What do they usually read in English?
- How often do they read?
- Do they like/dislike reading? Why?

Or in reading Log2 students are asked to read 4 short stories (2 pages minimum in length) and 1 poem and write a critical report for each story and the poem and include the following points in their report:

- What did they read (title, author)?
- When did they read (how long it took)?
- Brief summary of the story or the message of the poem
- Is the story/poem worth reading? Why?

In the third reading Log students will have to read 5 feature articles and write a critical report for each article. They can take feature articles from newspapers and magazines in print (for example, The Times, The Week, EL Gazette, Uzbekistan Today) or get them from on-line newspapers and journals (for example, Guardian, UzReport, BBC World). In their report include the following points:

- What did they read (title, author, newspaper/magazine, date of issue)?
- When did they read it?
- How long did it take them to read it?
- Brief summary of the article
- Is the article worth reading? Why? [5;6]

These tasks help to assess learner's ability to give a brief summary of the article, ability to detect author's point of view/attitude towards the subject of the article (with evidence from the text), ability to give own opinion about the article with reasons and comment on writer's use of language (difficult/easy to understand, neutral, objective, colourful, emotive).

We just analyzed a few types of assessment used in PreSETT program, but we hope you see that these assessment specifications support teaching and learning English, learning occurs by an active process of sense making. Open discussions or conversations are more likely to elicit a more coherent version of students' initial conceptual understandings as well as the reasoning behind their explanations. Students who attribute academic success to their own efforts are more likely to adopt "learning goals," which means they are motivated by an increasing sense of mastery and by the desire to become competent. Not surprisingly, students with a learning orientation are more engaged in school work, use more self-regulation and metacognitive strategies, and develop deeper understanding of subject matter [3:86].

References:

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