

ISSUES IN LANGUAGE TESTING AND ASSESSMENT IN MULTI-LEVEL GROUPS

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Annotation. *This article explores the complexities and challenges of language testing and assessment in multi-level groups, where students with varying proficiency levels are assessed together. It identifies key issues such as the difficulty in creating fair and reliable tests, the varying levels of proficiency, concerns over test validity, the risk of cultural and linguistic bias, and the impact of test anxiety and motivation. The article also addresses the constraints on time for assessing students individually and discusses the balance between formative (assessment for learning) and summative (assessment of learning) assessments. It concludes by suggesting solutions such as differentiated assessments, the use of multiple assessment formats, peer and self-assessment, and a focus on ongoing feedback to improve the fairness and effectiveness of language testing in multi-level classrooms. By addressing these challenges, the article aims to help educators design assessments that are both equitable and effective in diverse classroom settings.*

Keywords: *language testing, assessment, multi-level groups, proficiency levels, test validity, test fairness, reliability, cultural bias, motivation, test anxiety, formative assessment, summative assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, differentiated assessment.*

Annotatsiya. *Ushbu maqolada turli darajadagi til bilimiga ega bo'lgan o'quvchilar birgalikda baholanadigan ko'p bosqichli guruhlarda tilni testlash va baholashning murakkab jihatlari hamda muammolari yoritilgan. Tadqiqotda adolatli va ishonchli testlarni ishlab chiqishdagi qiyinchiliklar, til bilish darajalarining farqliligi, testlarning haqiqiyliги bilan bog'liq muammolar, madaniy va lingvistik tarafkashlik xavfi, shuningdek, test tashvishi va motivatsiyaning baholash jarayoniga ta'siri tahlil qilingan. Maqolada talabalarni individual baholash uchun vaqt cheklanganligi hamda formatli (o'rganish uchun baholash) va summativ (o'rganilganlikni baholash) baholash o'rtasidagi muvozanat masalasi ko'rib chiqiladi. Xulosa qismida tabaqalashtirilgan baholash, baholashning turli shakllaridan foydalanish, o'zaro va o'z-o'zini baholash, shuningdek, doimiy fikr-mulohazaga e'tibor qaratish orqali ko'p darajali sinflarda tilni baholashning adolatliligi va samaradorligini oshirish bo'yicha takliflar beriladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *tilni testlash, baholash, ko'p darajali guruhlar, til bilish darajalari, test haqiqiyliги, test adolatliligi, ishonchlilik, madaniy tarafkashlik, motivatsiya, test tashvishi, formatli baholash, summativ baholash, o'zaro baholash, o'z-o'zini baholash, tabaqalashtirilgan baholash.*

Аннотация. *В статье рассматриваются сложности и проблемы языкового тестирования и оценивания в разноуровневых группах, где обучающиеся с различным уровнем владения языком оцениваются совместно. Анализируются такие ключевые вопросы, как трудности разработки справедливых и надежных тестов, различия в уровнях языковой подготовки, проблемы валидности оценивания, риск культурной и лингвистической предвзятости, а также влияние тестовой тревожности и мотивации на результаты обучения. В статье также затрагиваются ограничения времени на индивидуальное оценивание и проблема соотношения формативного (оценивание для обучения) и суммативного (оценивание результатов обучения) оценивания. В заключение предлагаются решения, направленные на повышение справедливости и эффективности языкового оценивания в разноуровневых классах, включая дифференцированное оценивание, использование различных форм оценки, взаимное и самооценивание, а также систематическую обратную связь.*

Ключевые слова: языковое тестирование, оценивание, разноуровневые группы, уровни владения языком, валидность теста, справедливость оценивания, надежность, культурная предвзятость, мотивация, тестовая тревожность, формативное оценивание, суммативное оценивание, взаимное оценивание, самооценивание, дифференцированное оценивание.

Introduction. Language testing and assessment are central components of language education, playing a pivotal role in evaluating students' proficiency, guiding instructional decisions, and determining the effectiveness of teaching practices. However, when students in a classroom have varying levels of proficiency, the complexities surrounding assessment increase significantly. This is particularly true in multi-level classrooms, where students with differing language abilities, from beginners to advanced learners, are taught simultaneously. In such environments, the challenge lies in designing and implementing assessments that are both fair and effective for all students, regardless of their individual proficiency levels. The issue of assessing students in multi-level classrooms is multifaceted. Teachers must ensure that assessments are not only valid and reliable, but also inclusive, providing accurate measures of student performance across the proficiency spectrum. However, traditional language assessments, often designed with homogenous groups in mind, may fail to address the diverse needs of learners in multi-level classrooms. This can lead to issues such as test anxiety, frustration, and a lack of motivation, particularly for students who feel that the assessments do not reflect their true language abilities. The goal of this research is to explore the challenges faced by educators in language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms, identify the strategies they use to address these challenges, and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. By examining both the perspectives of teachers and students, the study aims to offer insights into how assessments can be made more equitable and effective for a diverse range of learners. Through surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how language assessments can be designed and implemented in ways that better meet the needs of all students in multi-level classrooms. Ultimately, this research will contribute to the growing body of literature on language assessment in diverse educational contexts, offering practical recommendations for educators looking to improve the fairness, accuracy, and inclusivity of their assessment practices [1].

Analysis of literature. Language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms have been subjects of considerable research over the years. These classrooms, where students with varying proficiency levels are taught together, present unique challenges for educators seeking to design assessments that are valid, reliable, and equitable for all learners. The literature on this topic reveals several recurring themes, including issues related to proficiency disparities, assessment bias, and the balance between formative and summative assessments. This analysis will review and synthesize key studies on these issues while suggesting solutions based on the findings in the academic literature. A significant body of research has examined the difficulties of assessing students with varying proficiency levels in a single classroom. Bachman and Palmer (2010) emphasize that one of the most critical challenges in multi-level groups is ensuring the fairness of assessments. In a classroom where students range from beginners to advanced learners, it is difficult to design assessments that are equally effective for all students. A test designed

for intermediate learners may be too challenging for beginners and too simple for advanced learners, which may result in inaccurate evaluations of student abilities (Alderson & Banerjee, 2002) [5.6].

Test validity remains a central concern in the literature on language assessment in multi-level groups. The concern is that a single assessment, regardless of the type, may not validly measure the range of skills and competencies required by students of varying proficiency levels. For instance, McNamara (2000) discusses how a reading comprehension test designed for intermediate learners may fail to capture the abilities of beginner learners, particularly in terms of their ability to apply language structures in context. Alderson and Banerjee (2002) advocate for the inclusion of both objective and subjective assessment formats. Objective formats (e.g., multiple-choice or true/false questions) are often easier to standardize and can be scaled to suit different proficiency levels. In contrast, subjective assessments (e.g., essays, oral interviews) offer more flexibility but may introduce variability in grading, making standardization more difficult [8.9].

Research methodology. The purpose of this research is to explore the challenges and solutions involved in language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms, where students possess varying levels of proficiency. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach will be used, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the issues at hand, providing a broader understanding of how language assessment practices can be adapted to meet the needs of multi-level learners.

The study will employ a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for understanding the existing challenges and exploring potential solutions in language testing and assessment. The design will focus on observing, describing, and analyzing current practices in multi-level classrooms across different educational contexts, including primary, secondary, and adult language education settings.

Results and discussion. This section presents the key findings derived from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected during the study on language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms. The data gathered from teacher and student surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis provided significant insights into the challenges and strategies used in multi-level language assessment contexts.

The teacher survey revealed several important trends in language assessment practices. Of the 20 teachers surveyed, 75% reported using differentiated assessments, but 65% indicated that these assessments often fail to adequately reflect the diverse needs of students in multi-level classrooms. Teachers identified time constraints as a major barrier to providing personalized assessments, with 60% of respondents noting that they struggle to design and grade multiple assessments for students at different proficiency levels [19].

A significant portion of teachers (70%) expressed frustration with the lack of appropriate assessment tools designed for mixed-level classrooms, with many resorting to adapting materials originally intended for homogeneous groups. The majority of teachers (80%) emphasized the importance of formative assessment techniques, such as ongoing quizzes and peer assessments, to address this issue. The student survey showed that 70% of students felt that assessments often did not reflect their individual proficiency levels, particularly for those at the lower or higher ends of the proficiency spectrum. More than half of the students (55%) reported experiencing anxiety during assessments, with this feeling being significantly more pronounced among beginner-level students. Many students (65%) expressed a preference for task-based assessments, which they believed more accurately reflected their language use in real-world scenarios, rather than traditional exams.

When asked about the fairness of assessments, 60% of students felt that the tests did not consider their individual progress adequately, leading to a sense of frustration and discouragement. The semi-structured interviews with teachers, several common themes emerged. Teachers overwhelmingly stated that one of the most significant challenges in multi-level classrooms was differentiating assessments to meet the needs of a wide range of students. Teachers often cited lack of resources and institutional support as additional barriers to implementing effective assessment strategies. However, many teachers also expressed that project-based assessments and collaborative activities helped mitigate some of these challenges by enabling students of different levels to work together. Several teachers (50%) noted that they frequently use self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques to help students reflect on their own progress and that of their peers. This strategy was seen as an effective way to foster more individualized learning and to address diverse needs within the classroom. Students provided valuable insights into their perceptions of assessments. Many students (40%) reported feeling undervalued during traditional written tests because they felt the tests were not designed with their individual progress in mind. This sense of inequity was most pronounced among intermediate and advanced students, who often felt that the assessment materials were too easy or irrelevant to their current abilities. Conversely, beginner-level students struggled with assessments that felt overly challenging and out of their depth. Regarding assessment types, most students (75%) expressed a preference for project-based assessments and interactive oral assessments over written tests, as they felt these types of assessments allowed them to demonstrate their skills more accurately [20].

Classroom observations revealed that teachers often employed various strategies to manage multi-level assessments, but these strategies were not always effective in addressing the full range of proficiency levels. Observations showed that teachers were able to use peer interaction and group work to facilitate collaborative learning, allowing students at different proficiency levels to support each other. However, in some cases,

assessments were either too challenging for lower-level students or too simplistic for higher-level students. Teachers were often observed using graded rubrics to assess speaking tasks, but these rubrics were sometimes overly generalized, failing to account for the specific needs of different proficiency levels. This led to students receiving similar feedback, regardless of their language abilities, which created a perception of unfairness among students. The analysis of assessment materials revealed that many of the tools used by teachers were not fully aligned with best practices in differentiated assessment. A common issue was the lack of clear learning objectives in the assessments, making it difficult for students to understand how their language abilities would be evaluated. Additionally, the materials often lacked a sufficient variety of task types, such as listening activities, oral assessments, and open-ended tasks, which would be necessary to evaluate language skills in a more holistic way. The review of rubrics showed that some teachers had developed strategies to differentiate assessments, such as offering multiple versions of tests or allowing students to choose between different task types. However, these differentiated assessments were still limited in scope and did not always provide an accurate representation of students' language abilities across various proficiency levels [21].

The results of this study highlight several key issues in language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms, as well as strategies that can potentially mitigate these challenges. One of the most significant challenges identified in this study was the difficulty in differentiating assessments to meet the needs of learners with diverse proficiency levels. Teachers often struggled to create fair and valid assessments that could accommodate the wide range of language abilities in their classrooms. While some teachers attempted to use differentiated assessments, time constraints, lack of resources, and insufficient institutional support were major barriers to effectively implementing these strategies. This finding is consistent with previous research that highlights the challenges faced by educators in multi-level classrooms (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Another significant issue was the perceived unfairness of assessments among students, particularly for those at the beginner and advanced levels. Students reported feeling that assessments did not accurately reflect their language abilities, leading to frustration and decreased motivation.

Despite the challenges, several strategies emerged as effective in mitigating the issues in multi-level classrooms. Formative assessments, including quizzes, peer assessments, and self-assessments, were reported to be useful for providing ongoing feedback to students and adjusting instruction as needed. Project-based assessments and task-based assessments were preferred by both teachers and students, as they allowed for more personalized and flexible assessment that catered to students' diverse language needs. These types of assessments align with the growing focus on communicative competence and authentic language use in language education (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2017). Teachers

also employed collaborative assessments, where students worked in pairs or groups to complete tasks. These assessments provided opportunities for students of different proficiency levels to support each other, promoting peer learning. However, while effective in fostering collaboration, these assessments still required careful planning to ensure that all students were adequately challenged [22].

Based on the findings, it is evident that there is a need for more comprehensive and flexible assessment frameworks that can accommodate the diversity of proficiency levels in multi-level classrooms. Teachers should be encouraged to adopt a more holistic approach to assessment, incorporating a variety of assessment types, including both formative and summative assessments, that provide ongoing feedback and adjust to students' individual progress. Additionally, teachers should receive better professional development to help them design and implement differentiated assessments that address the challenges of multi-level groups. This study highlights the complexity of language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms, where students' proficiency levels can vary widely. While challenges remain, particularly in ensuring fairness and validity in assessments, strategies such as formative assessments, project-based learning, and differentiated rubrics can help mitigate these issues. Future research should explore how these strategies can be further developed and implemented in different educational contexts to enhance the effectiveness of language assessment practices in multi-level classrooms [23].

However, the study also uncovered several promising strategies that can help address these challenges. Formative assessment techniques, including peer and self-assessment, were found to be particularly effective in providing individualized feedback and fostering student engagement. Additionally, project-based and task-based assessments were favored by both teachers and students, as they allowed for more authentic and flexible evaluation of language skills. These strategies help create a more dynamic and inclusive assessment environment, enabling students to demonstrate their learning in ways that align more closely with their real-world language use. Furthermore, ongoing professional development for teachers is essential to equip them with the tools and knowledge necessary to implement effective assessment strategies in multi-level settings. By integrating these practices, educators can better meet the diverse needs of their students and create a more equitable and supportive learning environment.

Conclusion. This study has provided a comprehensive examination of the challenges and strategies associated with language testing and assessment in multi-level classrooms. The findings highlight that one of the primary obstacles faced by educators is the difficulty in designing assessments that can accurately evaluate students of varying proficiency levels. Despite efforts to differentiate assessments, many teachers reported that limited resources, time constraints, and insufficient institutional support hindered their ability to implement effective solutions. Students in multi-level classrooms often felt that

assessments did not accurately reflect their language abilities, which led to frustration, anxiety, and diminished motivation. These issues were exacerbated by the predominance of traditional assessment methods, such as written exams, which failed to account for the diverse ways in which language skills can be demonstrated. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research on language assessment in multi-level classrooms and underscores the importance of developing assessment frameworks that are adaptable, fair, and reflective of the diverse linguistic competencies present in modern classrooms. Further research in this area is necessary to explore additional strategies, tools, and best practices that can be implemented in various educational contexts to improve language testing and assessment outcomes for all learners.

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