



KEY ASSESSMENT TEST MODIFICATION PROJECT PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF LANGUAGE TESTING

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ABSTRACT

This article presents data collection about the key features, principles and practices of language testing by modifying an available test to be valid, reliable, and practical for the target learner, including both theoretical and practical pictures of the process. Starting with studies on the target research, this work contains the learner assessment profile, the critique of an existing test, modified version of the chosen test together with appendix (material).

KEYWORDS

Modification, assessment, test, features, functions, principles, learners, practice, valid, reliable, implement, profile, critique, materials, teachers, practical, text, Madagascar, language, skills, reading, listening, speaking, writing, knowledge, instruction, test forms.

INTRODUCTION

According to Andres H (2019) 'Testing is an activity, which is used to assess product quality and enhance it by defining issues and defects'. Testing is useful for both teachers and students. There are different types of testing, which is aimed at identifying learners' strength and weaknesses, assessing or checking learners' ability. Teachers mostly use tests to determine whether students have acquired what is intended to learn. As Brown (2010) states, 'Testing is a

method of evaluating a learner's knowledge and performance in a certain domain'. From his viewpoint, we can understand that a test is an instrument, which refers to a set of techniques. With the help of different tests, we can measure learners' ability, if they are convenient, consistent, easy, useful to implement and if they really satisfies learner's needs. This research paper indicates how to modify five items of existing

test in order to develop validity and reliability of the test. It includes three main parts:

- First, learner assessment profile: here the information is about the learner, whom I focused as a test taker, her educational setting and the test that she has had the last time.
- Second, Critique of an existing language test: in this part description of existing test, its principles and strengths and weaknesses.
- The last one, Modification of the chosen test: ways and explanation of how to modify the test are informed in this part.

The Learners assessment profile.

As I am teaching in higher education current moment, I am experienced with the level of the target learners there, That's why I planned to design my test for a learner, who studied at one of the schools in the city which is a new context for me. I tried to talk with her in order to get much more information about the learner, whom I chose as a model, to modify an exciting test to satisfy her needs.

My learner's name is Adolat Abdullayeva. She is a eighteen-year-old Uzbek girl. She studies at 8th grade and one of the students, who is very smart and eager to learn the language. Although she is not good at the other subjects, she is interested in learning the English language. When I asked her future specialty, she said that she would be an English teacher in the future. That is why; she wants to have more lessons that are English. She was born in Tashkent and she is the only child, who knows the English language in her family, so she does not have chance to communicate in English at home. However, when she comes across foreigners in the street or museums, she is hurry to speak with them.

She has never been to any foreign country, and she began learning English from fifth grade as a foreign language at school. However, she was not able to acquire it well. Because the timeline of English language was not enough for her to acquire a new language. She learnt it just for three years: from fifth to eight grades. In addition, the atmosphere to learn English was not so perfect for her to learn. May be because of that reason, she had difficulty learning the language at the school. Nevertheless, when she tried to attend to extra courses. She has been learning the language for almost three years. Hence, she has still some difficulty communicating. Besides English, she knows the Russian language too; even she knows the Russian better than English.

As to the school, where she studies, there are so many subjects to focus. Before the beginning of a new academic year, pupils of five, six, seven, eight and ninth grades of the school are assessed. So, they have placement test. Teachers test their students in order to know what level they are. As for the level, B1 is required according to CEFR (Common European Framework Reference) for higher grades. The teachers rely on CLT approach while teaching students. Besides this placement test, students are assessed after finishing each term, which is called achievement test. With the help of this test, the teachers check their learners whether they have achieved the subject or not. Therefore, they have midterm and final tests as well. Furthermore, the teachers try to test the learners at every lesson to know if they are really improving the language. These tests help students to develop their knowledge. The students, who are finishing the school, have special achievement test.

The syllabus and textbook that they use are designed and chosen by the government with a bit modification

by teachers. It has two versions: Students Book and Workbook. Teachers use Students book at the lesson but give homework to do the exercises, tests in the Workbook at home. It is like a home task book. There are different tasks, tests with different techniques to do at home in this Workbook. The learners do these tests at home and check together with the teacher at the lesson. The Adolat's result from the tests, which are administered by teacher in each lesson, is satisfying. The student book includes different tests too. Students try to evolve their knowledge on what they have learnt, with the help of exercises given in the student book, at every lesson. Besides, the teachers sometimes use other textbooks as extra materials, which are very interesting, including all language skills. Because the Students Book and Workbook are somehow easy or boring for some students at the lyceum. That is why the teachers sometimes motivate the students with the different textbooks to develop their skills. These books contain many tests related to the themes. Different techniques are used in the textbooks like: multiple choice, gap filling, question and answers, true and false, etc.

The most recently placement test that the student has done was taken place at beginning the first course. As I have mentioned above, the pupils at school are tested before starting a new course. The reason of this placement test is that the teachers intend to identify the learners' current level. In order to carry out this test, the teachers have special preparation. They make a room for the test to help the students feel comfortable and get the students sit separately. It really helped and affected for students avoid cheating, which is easier to know their level clearly. The result of my learner was better than the result of the first try. The results indicated that her level is B1. As for the test,

all language skills were integrated in the test, which is at stake nowadays. Different techniques were addressed in the test. It was valuable, reliable to use, and it definitely could identify the learner's level. It can be implemented for the other groups of students again in order to place students. Actually, her teacher sometimes uses such kind of placement tests to check the students' level even it is not implemented in appropriate time. Maybe it is not kind of a placement test, but the students may know their level with the help of the test. The tests, which are always substituted by the teacher, are based on all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The critique of an existing test/assessment.

When I asked help from the teacher of the learner to give me an exam test to work on its modification to enhance validity and reliability of the test, she agreed and gave one that she had. Actually, the test included four techniques focusing four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I decided to work on the reading section of the test. As for the others, I thought they were enough reliable to implement.

The reading test consists of the text and option part. The text is about 'Madagascar - when need to go' containing of four paragraphs. There are ten questions, which ask the test taker to answer. The true and false technique is involved. There is a structure above the text and the questions below.

While using the test at the lesson, one may not recognize the issues of the test, but if we discuss the test according to the principles, we may find followings.

Firstly, the chosen words used in the text are some difficult for the level B1. Besides, there are some

phrases used in the text, which are challenging to understand for the level B1. The students may have difficulty catching these complicated words. This can affect the validity of the test. Hence, they can guess the core meaning of the words from the content. The test is somehow not accessible by linguistically and culturally to my profile learner, because the text does not require linguistic knowledge to read, and since it is about Madagascar, I am not sure that it is based on the learner's culture too. However, the learner does not come across strange or unpleasant biases, situations, while working on the test. There are just facts about the weather and seasons of Madagascar.

I cannot say that the test is reliable. Because, there is problem with instruction, and another issue with the question and answer. I will inform about it below in the weakness part.

As to the practicality of the test, actually, it is not so easy to prepare the true false test, however, it easy for teachers to check, it does not take much time, because the questions require a certain answer. Moreover, it is paper-based test and students can get the test separately in their hand, it can be adapted considering the learners need.

The test is authentic as I think. Because there are facts about 'Madagascar', which exists in the real world. There are some real occasions, which are happening in our daily life. Hence, the text includes some information that students rarely face every day,

When I got the test from the teacher, I asked if she tried the test with her students or not. Then she said yes, however, not with the students who is my profile learner and then I asked about the effect of the test and she informed me like some of the students got

positive, bit unfortunately most of them negative washback. When it is time to review the test, I found tree strengths and three weaknesses of the existing test.

The first strength of the test is that: the text is named. Sometimes, may be in most cases, texts are not named and it makes for test takers difficult to do the test, since they do not know what the text is about. If the text has a name, students can be informed an overall meaning of the text. When they see the name of the text, they understand immediately what kind of information is going to expected to cover. The name 'Madagascar – when to go' indicates that the text aims at giving information Madagascar and suitable time to travel there.

The next strength that I identified is that: the questions are based on the text, not out of text, except one. Even though there are some problems with the questions but anyway they are related to the text. The test instructor made the questions relying on the text.

The third strength is that: the text, which was chosen by instructor, is interesting and not too long. It can motivate the learners to do the test. After reading the text, students do not have difficulty to do the test, even there are some unfamiliar words for the learners, but still, they can get overall comprehension from the content. There is interesting information about Madagascar. Besides the text is not so long, which takes much time to read and make the learner get bored. It consists of just four short paragraphs. On reading the text, students may develop their grammar skill as well. Because the sentences in the text are quite correctly made. When I looked through the syllabus of the lyceum, grammar is also focused while teaching students.

As for the weaknesses of the test: firstly, as I have mentioned above the instruction of the text is explained partially and one instructor for both text and questions, written at the beginning of the text. The instructors are not given separately. The traditional method is involved in the test, writing like ‘Read and choose’.

The second weakness is that: the instructor did not estimate the time, Timing indicates to students that how much time they should spend on a test. If the time is not limited, students do not feel the responsibility for the test or, they may began cheating from each other.

Turning to the last weakness, I can say that looking through the test; I found out that there is another problem with the test, especially with a question and answers. There is a question, which requires Not Given answer; however, students cannot find the Not Given option in the test. The test includes two: True and False options. Therefore, students may have difficulty choosing when there is not appropriate answer given in the question. So test taker may have hesitation whether it is True or False.

Modified version of the chosen test/assessment.

After analyzing the weaknesses of the existing test, I planned to modify five items in order to meet the learner’s need and make the test more valid and reliable.

‘The modification is the concern that racial, ethnic, or common differences might adversely affect the meaning, reliability, validity of original test’ (McDowell & Newell 2006).

The first item that I wanted to change is the instruction of the text. There are two reasons for this modification.

The first reason why I modified the instruction of the text is to make it much clearer to the learner. Because ‘Read the text and choose true or false’ shows some unclear sense about the test for the learner. Even there is no word like ‘below’. Some students may confuse whether they should choose the answers relying on the text or not.

The next reason, I changed the instruction because of avoiding using the old strategy. I applied another strategy while designing the test. For example, ‘Read the text below more attentively so that you can answer the questions, depending on the text, without looking at or searching the information from the text’. If they just read the text and choose the answers looking for the text, they may not understand what the text is about, so that’s why she/he is trying to find answers from the text. However, if test takers read this instruction, they immediately understand that they should read the text paying attention to the overall comprehension of the text predicting what kind of questions they may have after reading the text.

As Genesee and Upshur (1996) stated that ‘Tests are firstly should be concerned with clear the instruction in order to help students understand what they are being expected to have’

The second item, which I referred to change, is the modification of the test’s instruction. Unfortunately, there is no instruction given above the test. One instruction is for both text and test, which is written above the text. I think it is much more understandable when the instructions are separated with clear instructions for both, which develop the reliability of the test. Students can easily understand what they have to do firstly and then how they do it by reading both clear instructions. The instruction of the test

should be the continuation of the first instruction. For example, 'Now close the text and choose the correct option below, relying on your comprehension or memory about the text'. Here learners close the text and try to choose the appropriate answer. This strategy is much better and useful for students than the traditional one. Because they do not look through the text, like rote taking, but work on the text in order to catch and keep it in their mind. As the text is easy, short and interesting enough in modified version, students can remember the text at least key elements, which help to do the test.

According to Stephanie Allan (2014), the students tries to do well in exams, to portion out their time, when they have limited time.

The third item that I really wanted to focus on is the limitation of the time. When I was looking into the test, I could not see the timing part. I think time is important, especially when the reading test is given to students. Otherwise, they spend the whole lesson doing the test. They may read the text for a half hour and do the test in another half hour. They think that they have free time to do the test; they may waste their time just looking the paper. That is why time should be limited and students must see it in the paper, which urges them to be quick. In this modified test five minutes is given for the text and five minutes is to answer the questions. So overall students should spend ten minutes for the test. For example, Read the text below in five minutes', 'Now close the text and choose the answer in five minutes'.

The next item is about answers, which I have mentioned in the weakness part of my paper. There are two answers for a question in the test: True and False. Hence, for some questions, there is no answer because

it is not given in the text. For that reason, I to added Not Given answer too.

As Scott Shwertly (2012) mentions that 'Vocabulary is one of skill that we do not think seriously about it while using and we do not consider the level of the students.

The last item I intended to modify depends on the vocabulary of the text. There are some complex words used in the text that students of B1 level may find problem to catch their meaning. Sometimes it is difficult to translate some words if the learners have never used them or faced. Changing these complex words into easier ones suits their level; they can remember the text and do the test without challenging. Then I can put my strategy into practice, which I informed above.

This modification version is much more suitable to my learner I think. Because the instructions are clearly explained, even I divided the instructions into two. Since my model together with her group mates' level is B1 (even some of theirs are lower than that level), the instructions should be accurate. Now there is no trouble with the options, because there are three options that allow her choose Not Given one too, if she cannot find the answer, even looking from the text. As for the text, there are no more complicated words, which she does not know. However, unfortunately or fortunately time is limited to do the test. Nevertheless, I think there is enough time to do the test, which deserves to her level.

After modifying the test, I administered it to my learner. Since old version of the test was not applied to my learner yet, firstly I gave her the old one and then the modified version in order to contrast the results of the tests. When I administered the old test to my

student, she began asking questions like: ‘How much time will you give me to do the test’, ‘Can I use dictionary to do the test because I do not know some words in the text’, ‘Is there right answer in the second question’, and the like. As for result of the test, she could find only five right answers out of ten. Moreover, when I gave her, my changed test, there was no questions from her; even she began to read seriously, after looking into the instruction of the text. Because she found out that, she should not just read and find answer with the help of the text but comprehend the text. When she saw the time limitation, she even tried to concentrate on the test only and the test was done in time. She really liked the strategy that I used in the test. She learnt the text very attentively and did the tests without any difficulty. I asked her opinion about the tests that she practiced. She said that when she was doing the first test, she just read and choose the answer from the text and she could not remember any words or meaning of the test. Hence, when she was given the modified test, she took it seriously. She added that she could catch everything, the instruction and the text are understandable, and the answers to the questions could be found easily. Even she kept the meaning of the text and answers in her mind. As for the result, she was able to do all.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this research, I should say that I learnt from this assignment a lot. In order to do this assignment I went to the lyceum and learnt the assessing system, the tests, which are used to identify the students’ ability and level. So now, I am aware of what kind of tests are utilized at the lyceums. Besides, I developed my knowledge about assessment, its principles, how to analyze a test, for what I have to pay

attention while designing a test, what kind of techniques to use, or how to find the lack of a test etc.

Assessment is a significant part or component of learning, because it helps students to learn and explore the very best of their abilities (Amanda 2017).

However, I have to admit that designing a test is not easy work. Nevertheless, it was a good practice for me for the future job. I think I will not have difficulty preparing tests using different techniques. Now I have an experience on assessing.

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