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TESTS AS TOOLS FOR ASSESSING STUDENTS' PROGRESS

This article defines the role of assessment in the learning process and its influence on students' motivation. It also identifies the main types of tests, their purposes, test questions and their advantages, as well as characterizing the syllabus of the course "Foreign Language for Specific Purposes".

Key words*: assessment; motivation; syllabus; tests types; tests questions.*

Introduction. Students' progress is evaluated throughout the whole learning process but assessment can be used not only for grading students' performance, but also for promoting effective learning and motivating students to learn. Contrary to the typical belief that teaching-learning process has only these two sides, Norman Gronlund highlights the fact that the third component which is assessing is an inevitable part of students' successful learning [1]. In the process of teaching the biggest challenge is finding the way to improve student's motivation. If we deliberate this matter, we come to the conclusion that it is not only the methods of teaching and the resources that are crucial for student's success but also the assessment which makes learning more effective. Black and William point out that assessment improves learning together with effective feedback, involving students in their own learning, and show the profound influence of assessment on the motivation and self-esteem of the students [2]. This can be achieved by means of understanding that the three aspects such as teaching, learning and assessing are interrelated and serve the same

purpose, the one of gaining the best possible knowledge of the studied subject. Thoroughly developed assessment methods give a clear understanding what should be done in order to achieve the best results in learning. Norman Gronlund states that assessment should take place at three different stages of learning: before starting the course, throughout the course and at the end of the course. So, it can be concluded that assessment should be continuing. It is worth to start with assessing the students' knowledge at the beginning of the course as it can help divide them into groups of more or less similar level of knowledge which makes it easier for both weaker and stronger students to have progress within their group. Assessment conducted throughout the course should take place at the end of each important part such as module. It will help teachers as well as students to measure the progress made and detect the possible gaps in learning the material. At the end of the course final assessment takes place in order to measure the level of acquired knowledge and give students marks [3].

Assessment is one of the most powerful educational tools for promoting effective learning bur it should be used correctly. Students see these assessments as fair measures of important learning goals. Teachers facilitate learning by providing students with important feedback on their learning progress and by helping them identify learning problems [4]. Increasing the amount of testing will not enhance learning but adequate and valid testing will help both the students and the teachers to succeed.

Assessment it beneficial because it motivates students. Motivation occurs when students understand the goals they are aiming at, the required outcomes, the types of tasks they are set and when they receive constructive feedback on their work so that they would clearly understand what steps must be taken in order to achieve the outcomes. Awaited assessment stimulates the process of learning and fulfilling the assignments, thus it will urge students to work hard in order to achieve educational outcomes of the course and encourage them to work more intensively. Establishing clear learning targets helps students understand what they should learn, but not only the teachers should establish the goals, but the students as well. According to the research by D.H. Schunk and B. J. Zimmermann, students learn more when they set clear goals for themselves [5]. Clear defining of the objectives is the key to reaching good results. Assessment it beneficial because it teaches students to solve more complicated problems, that is to apply the acquired ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information in order to solve other tasks besides those set by the test and to deal with life challenges in future using these approaches. Assessment it beneficial because it defines students' self-assessment. Systematic assessment and clear feedback bring about students' understanding of their capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. According to James H. McMillan and Jessica Hearn correctly implemented, student self-assessment can promote intrinsic motivation, internally controlled effort, a mastery goal orientation and more meaningful learning [6].

Thus it can be concluded that the teacher's task in terms of modern educational technologies and methods is not only meant to provide students with necessary information on the course but also to assess their progress, provide them with constructive feedback at every stage of learning process, encourage them to search for additional information on their own, analyze and apply it properly.

According to the recently adopted syllabus of the course "Foreign Language for specific purposes" of Lviv National Polytechnic University first year students are to master four major topics known as modules. They comprise Socialising in Academic and Professional Environment, Searching for and Processing Information, Presenting Information, Application Procedure. At the beginning of the course students are familiarized with the objectives and expected outcomes of the course so that they will be able to concentrate more on the points necessary to take into account in order to succeed in reaching these outcomes.by the end of the first module students are expected to be able to maintain a conversation on the topic connected to their profession, make arrangements on the phone, leave or take messages, write emails, forum posts and comments expressing their own opinion, be able to fill application and registration forms. Second module aims at teaching students how to extract general and specific information, distinguish between important and less important, relevant and irrelevant information, identify general and detailed information from the sources in job-related environment. These modules are mastered by students throughout the first term and the level of knowledge is assessed by means of two interim tests which take place at the end of each module. The third module concentrates on teaching students the basis of making presentations,

using both linguistic and non-linguistic means of communication, demonstrating sufficient knowledge of academic and job-related vocabulary and the ability to use visual aids, such as graph charts, pie charts, bar charts etc. The measurement of students' progress is carried out by assessing their presentation as the final outcome of this module. Finally, the fourth module deals with application procedure which includes students' ability to write education and employment-related papers such as resumes and cover letters, attend job interviews and perform there successfully using relevant language while asking and responding to the interviewer's questions. These skills are assessed in the form of written papers and role-playing [7].

The outcomes which are set in the syllabus are corresponding the general taxonomy of learning outcomes. Classification of the learning outcomes known as taxonomy was developed by Benjamin Bloom who classified educational learning objectives into cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Cognitive domain is classified into six categories starting from the simplest. According to Bloom's taxonomy cognitive learning is demonstrated by the ability to remember previously learned material, understand the meaning of information, ability to apply gained knowledge to actual situations, the ability to analyze and synthesize data as well as evaluate alternative solutions, other ideas and actions [1]. These abilities are also differentiated by the level of complexity where analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating are considered to be more complicated.

If we take a closer look at each level of Bloom's taxonomy, we can classify the tasks students are given in each of the four modules according to this table of cognitive learning skills. The knowledge and comprehension of the module-related vocabulary is assessed in the tasks of current, interim and summative test papers which students have throughout the academic year. The first two tasks of each paper usually require students to arrange, match, select, identify etc. the information they were to learn in the course and now have in their test papers. The ability to recall the meaning of the words and grammar structures provides successful completing of the tasks. However, these tasks are not considered to be very challenging as they do not demonstrate students' ability to apply their knowledge in full, thus they are evaluated in less points than more complicated ones. The ability to apply information learned throughout the module is evaluated by means of the tasks which require students to choose the correct responses to the questions such as during the telephone conversation, job interviews or arranging parts of emails or letters in the correct logical order. The tasks where students have to recall the difference between the usage of certain words and grammar structures such as use of English tasks demand the ability to analyze, differentiate and distinguish between similar notions with the ability to choose the right ones. And finally, what actually the course of English for specific purpose is aiming at is the ability to analyze and synthesize all the learned information and create a new product, which can be in a form of an email, a cover letter, a presentation etc. and requires students to accumulate all the knowledge they have gained throughout the course and produce a written or oral piece of work which is expected from them at the end of the module or the course.

Students' progress is measured by means of using tests throughout the whole process of learning on condition that they are taking place at different stages of learning. It is an important tool of modern teaching technology which serves a purpose for evaluating the level of students' knowledge. Test is defined as an array of questions which require definite answers and which are arranged according to certain procedures and techniques [8]. It is supposed to be effective, valid and reliable. In pedagogy the notion of test is taken to mean a specific unified way of assessing skills which consists of tasks intended to measure the qualities of a person which are prone to change throughout systematic learning process. Thus, not only the level of knowledge can be measured, but also the consistency of it, as it can show which chapter or section students have mastered and which they are weak at.

It is essential to take a closer look at the types of tests which can be used to assess the level of the foreign language knowledge. Tests can be classified according to four main features. It is necessary to understand the difference between the types of tests, however, not all of them can be used by teachers at higher educational establishments.

According to the specific purpose tests are divided into four categories. The importance of these four different kinds of language tests lies in the fact that different tests serve different purposes. In order to select tests adequately and to interpret their results accurately, teachers need to be aware of the ultimate purpose of the testing context.

Proficiency tests

These tests are not intended to be limited to any course, curriculum, or single skill in the language. Proficiency tests traditionally consist of standardized multiple-choice items on grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, aural comprehension, and sometimes of a sample of writing. A typical example of a standardized proficiency test is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (**TOEFL**) produced by the Educational Testing Service. It is used by nearly 1000 institutions of higher education in the United States as an indicator of a prospective student's ability to undertake academic work in an English medium. It is not possible to use this test as a means of measuring students' success throughout the course.

Diagnostic and Placement tests

These tests are designed to diagnose particular aspects of a language, such as pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar etc. Certain proficiency tests and diagnostic tests can act in the role of placement tests whose purpose is to place a student in a particular level or section of a language curriculum or school. A placement test typically includes a sampling of material to be covered in the curriculum (that is, it has content validity), and it thereby provides an indication of the point at which the student will find a level or class to be neither too easy nor too difficult but to be appropriately challenging. Before starting a course of English for specific purposes first-year students of Lviv National Polytechnic University take this test in order to be placed in a group of a particular level.

Achievement Tests

An achievement test is related directly to classroom lessons, units, or even a total curriculum. Achievement tests are limited to particular material covered in a curriculum within a particular time frame. Students take achievement tests at the end of each module of the course Foreign Language for Specific Purposes, the term or the academic year.

Aptitude tests

This is the type of test that is given to a person prior to any exposure to the second language, a test that predicts a person's future success. A foreign language aptitude test is designed to measure a person's capacity or general ability to learn a foreign language and to be successful in that undertaking. Aptitude tests are considered to be independent of a particular foreign language, predicting success in the acquisition of any foreign language.

According to the way the assessment is carried out, tests are divided into three types:

Current achievement test

These tests are usually given throughout the process of learning and are restricted to defined due dates. The aim of the test is to check the level of perception of the studied material, define the necessary content and technique changes. The individual work of students is assessed, as well as additional out-of-classroom work, working with profession-related texts, mastering practical skills etc. These tests take place quite often as the new vocabulary, grammar or written tasks appear.

Interim achievement test

An interim achievement test is administered to measure student achievement – where students are starting – and growth over time and to target additional resources for students and teachers, interim data can help them understand how the student is progressing, what areas he or she needs extra help in – and where he or she is doing well. Interim assessments are sometimes called "benchmark assessments", but there is a subtle difference. Benchmark Assessments are given periodically throughout a term to establish baseline achievement data and measure progress towards a standard or set of academic standards and goals. They provide teachers with information about which content standards have been mastered and which require additional instruction, identifying students' strengths and needs. The students of Lviv National Polytechnic University typically take two test papers of this kind in the first term.

Summative achievement test

Summative assessment includes final tests, credits, exams etc. The main goal is to evaluate the work of a student over a certain period of time, his or her theoretical knowledge, skills of individual work, the ability to synthesize this knowledge and apply it to solving practical tasks. The content of the final assessment should correspond to the syllabus and comprise all the sections

learned. Primarily these tests are used to assign course grades. According to the course Foreign Language for Specific Purposes students take summative tests at the end of the first term and at the end of the academic year.

According to the focus tests are divided into discrete tests and integral tests.

Discrete item (or discrete point) tests

These are tests which test one element of language at a time. They have the advantages of often being practical to administer and mark, and objective in terms of marking. They show only the learners' ability to recognize, thus they are inevitably indirect tests**.**

Integrative tests

These tests may be either direct or indirect. They test more than one skill and/or item of knowledge at a time, because they ask the learner to demonstrate their ability to perform a specific communicative task by asking them to actually do it. They therefore demonstrate the learners' ability to use the language in actual communication.

According to the similarity to norms and criteria tests can be categorized into two major groups: norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. These two tests differ in their intended purposes, the way in which content is selected, and the scoring process which defines how the test results must be interpreted.

Norm-referenced tests

A norm-referenced test estimates the position of the learner who is tested in a predetermined group of tested individuals with respect to the point which is measured. This type of test identifies whether the test taker performed better or worse than other test takers, not whether the test taker knows either more or less material than is necessary for a given purpose.

Criterion-referenced tests

A criterion-referenced test is a test which uses test scores to generate a statement about the behavior that can be expected of a person with that score. Most tests and quizzes that are written by teachers can be considered criterion-referenced tests. The objective is simply to see whether the student has learned the material.

Whatever the purpose of the test is teachers can use the adequate one. However, the test tasks are generally similar in their structure and can be classified into multiple-choice tests, matching tests and open-question tests.

Multiple choice questions – a kind of task where the student is supposed to choose an answer to the question among a few given options. Multiple-choice tests typically test what students know, whether or not they understand (comprehension), and their ability to apply what they have learned (application). Some questions might assess the ability to analyze or evaluate information. The advantages of this question type are that it is easy to mark and minimizes guess work by having multiple distracters. Multiple choice tests can be used to test such things as grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening etc.

Matching tests are the tests where the statements are supposed to be matched to one of the provided corresponding items. This could be individual words, words and definitions, parts of sentences, pictures to words etc. These tests are often used to assess recognition and recall and so are most often used in courses where acquisition of detailed knowledge is an important goal. Whilst it is easy to mark, students sometimes can get the right answers without knowing the words, if most of the answers are correct the last one left must be right. To avoid this, it is necessary to have more words than necessary. These tasks are mainly used to tests the vocabulary and general understanding of written extracts.

Gap-filling tasks require students to write one or more words in order to complete the sentence. They can be used to tests a variety of areas such as vocabulary and grammar and are very effective at testing listening skills. Although they are easy to write and mark, but teachers must remember that sometimes more than one answer might be possible.

True/false Questions are mainly used to test listening and reading comprehension. Students have to decide whether the statements are correct or not. The tasks can sometimes be more complicated if the third option of "not stated" is included together with "true" or "false". These tasks are easy to mark, but the chances of guessing are sometimes quite high.

Open questions such as essays, letters, reviews and articles require students to write answers to statements or questions. To complete a successful essay task, they need to be able to recall relevant information and to organize it in a clear way, generating a thesis and performing a conclusion. Essay tests determine whether or not students can make connections among various ideas, apply course information to new situations, and (most importantly) demonstrate that they have made the information their own. Essay exams are useful tools for finding out if students are able to sort through an extensive amount of information, figure out what is important, and explain why it is important. Essays challenge students to come up with key course ideas and put them into their own words using the interpretive or analytical skills they have practiced in the course. Essay questions are typically used to assess students' ability to analyze or evaluate material, as well as to create (synthesize) new material based on the gained knowledge. All these questions are included in the tests papers and examination papers for students of the course Foreign Language for specific Purposes and prove to be effective for evaluating their knowledge. There are obvious advantages of using tests as tools for assessing students' progress because they are easy to mark and to take, so they are less time consuming for both teachers and students; there is a possibility to test several students at a time; they can be checked by means of computers; students do not need to focus on their handwriting etc. It wouldn't be fair only to praise tests as there are also some drawbacks such as chances of guessing the correct answers, standardized thinking not taking into account the level of personal development, a lot of time which is necessary to write tasks [9]. However, advantages definitely outweigh disadvantages so it should be concluded that test should be used for the benefit of learning.

Conclusion. The article points out the influence of assessment on the learning process based on the theories presented by various scholars. It also concludes that using assessment effectively is beneficial, because it improves students' motivation, helps them to acquire the ability to meet and overcome life challenges and solve other problems using approaches and techniques learned while taking tests, and also helps students to assess themselves and identify strategies that improve their understanding and skills. This article also analyses the types of assessment used in the syllabus of Lviv Polytechnic National University, classifying them according to Bloom's taxonomy. And finally, the notion of the test as a powerful instrument of measuring students' progress is presented and the classification of the types of tests and test questions is given.

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Abstract. Introduction. In this article the notion of assessment in general and the test in particular as an instrument for assessing students' progress have been studied. The role of assessment is unfairly narrowed only to evaluating students' level of knowledge, however, it is an important component in the process of learning. Setting clear objectives helps students to understand what is expected from them at the end of the course of studies, while

being given a valuable feedback on the results of their work students are able to identify their learning problems and thus this encourages them to work more intensively.

Purpose. The purpose of the article is to identify the types of tests and the clarify when and why they are used. Tests are frequently used tools for evaluating students' progress. However, whilst there is a wide variety of tests available not all of them are appropriately used. Kinds of tests differ depending on the purpose, so teachers should clearly understand which particular kinds are to be used. According to Bloom's taxonomy learning objectives vary depending on the complexity of the mental processes. So do the test tasks. They range from the easiest ones such as matching or true/false tasks to more complex ones such as essays. Being valid and reliable tests will be beneficial for students' success

Results. A thorough look into the newly adopted syllabus of the course "Foreign Language for Specific Purposes" proves that the trend of using tests for assessing students' knowledge at different stages of learning has become an inevitable part of teaching-learning process at Lviv National Polytechnic University. The practice of using tests in the process of learning and teaching has now become quite common, yet not with all academic courses. With the implementation of the new syllabus the need to develop various tests arises. Thus it is necessary to understand the difference between the types of tests and test tasks in order to make them valid and fair.

Originality. It is a stereotype to regard assessment as the instrument only for grading students' work. However, it is an integral component of the process of teaching-assessing-learning as it enhances students' motivation and should be viewed considering this aspect.

Conclusion. The aim of the present research was to clarify the difference between the types of tests and test tasks. These findings enhance our understanding of these and help us to choose the appropriate ones while assessing students' progress. It also concludes that using assessment effectively is beneficial, because it improves students' motivations, helps them to acquire the ability to meet and overcome life challenges and solve other problems using approaches and techniques learned while taking tests, and also helps students to assess themselves and identify strategies that improve their understanding and skills.

Key words: *assessment; motivation; syllabus; tests types; tests questions.*