

ASSESSING SPEAKING SKILLS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

In 2012, the implementation of Presidential Decree 1875 regarding the strengthening of foreign language education led to a significant shift in the approach to language instruction utilized across the nation. Specifically, the traditional grammar-translation method was wholly replaced by the communicative language teaching (CLT) method. The pedagogical approach employed to impart instruction to our students places prominence on acquiring a rudimentary understanding of the language in question. Consequently, a notable proportion of our student cohort demonstrated limited proficiency in their target language.

The present study endeavors to examine the correlation that lies between the methods of pedagogy implemented in secondary education and the evaluating system adopted for entrance examinations.

Key words: Curriculum requirements, assessment criteria, correlation, placement tests, communicative competence, CEFR, CLT

INTRODUCTION

In order to ensure that learners are equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively utilize language in practical, real-world scenarios, it is imperative that the testing system used to evaluate their abilities also reflects this communicative approach.

The objective of this study is to examine the issue pertaining to wash-back effect adverse impacts on learners who are evaluated in a manner that differs from the teaching method employed.

According to Johnson (1989), a predominant concern among individuals involved in education systems is not whether students are improving their communicative competence, but rather, whether they are progressing towards successful completion of examinations. The primary motivation for language learners is often to attain high exam scores and enable the continuation of their academic pursuits at the university level.

According to Cook (2003), the assessment of successful acquisition of communicative language should center, not on proficiency in grammar and pronunciation, but rather on the individual's capacity to utilize and engage in communicative acts with the language. It follows that when instructing the CLT approach, it is incumbent upon educators to appraise their students' assessment through the lens of communicative competence. Furthermore, assessment has to be consistent, valid and provide a positive wash-back effect regarding to learning languages. If a learner knows that he would come across with what he learns in class in entrance exams, he will be motivated and encouraged to continue learning during the class. Or if he knows that he is not expected to be assessed according to the method or what he learn in class, he simply ignores the school program by paying more attention to what he is supposed to be evaluated on exam day.

This kind of situations have been observed in Asian countries such as South Korea, China, Bangladesh when they begin implement CLT method instead of grammar translation method.

Seth (2002) states that "...examination system illustrates the importance of education as a determiner of social status, the Korean concern with rank and status, and the universal desire for and belief in the possibility of upward mobility". That is to say, that exam plays a huge role in Korean culture and it determines not only one's knowledge, but also his future success and status.

Dailey (2010) states that as a result of globalization the need for the English language in Korea increased as this foreign language plays a huge role in promoting international exchange, enhance economic relations and expanding one's knowledge on science. Therefore, to meet the needs, Korean government began to exploit communicative approaches to the national curriculum. Despite the advancement in technology, some drawbacks in teaching and assessing in CLT, have been observed. In 1993, the existing grammar tests replaced with the College Scholastic Ability tests in placement tests. However, at the beginning the tests contained only reading and listening questions. It was believed that CLT method, taught at school does not fully meet students' needs in terms of entrance exams. After becoming aware that speaking and writing skills taught at school would not be evaluated in exam, students and their parents require teachers to focus on other skills rather than teaching writing and speaking competences at school. As a result, the entrance exams created a mismatch between language policy and school curriculum because of the role of entrance exam in students life made it much more important than implementation of CLT. That is to say, both parents and students were so obsessed to pass the entrance exam and focused on just preparation for the skills which are tested in exams and ignored speaking and writing skills taught at school despite the fact that these skills are considered to be

necessary in communicative approach. As a consequence, the outcomes, set for communicative approach were not achieved.

Dailey (2010) states that with the addition of listening comprehension tasks to entrance exams, students began to develop their listening comprehension skills. It served as a motivation to acquire this skill as students realize the necessity of learning it if they would like to achieve high results.

Iqbal (2016) states in the 1990s the Ministry of Bangladesh the CLT method was implemented instead of Grammar-translation method in all educational institutions of Bangladesh with the hope of enabling students to use English in authentic contexts. The government redevelop the curriculum, changed the textbooks, sent teachers to in-service institutions, yet the objectives are still hardly to achieve. The author further states that one of the main reasons for this issue is that testing system, which is on practice nowadays, does not reflect the true aspects of CLT. Most teachers prefer to use grammar-translation way aiming to help their students to achieve high results in exams.

Billah (2015) says that students in Bangladesh fail in both to learn correct English and to communicate soundly using broken English. Why? As our students' main purpose is to pass the exam, they intend to focus on grammar rather than to learn how to interact with language. While learning English for general purposes at primary and secondary education, they learn using a CLT method, however, assessed in a Grammar-translation method in exams. In consequence, they become neither good at grammar, nor at other language skills.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

As the main actors in this sphere are teachers and learners, the need analysis was conducted involving both of them. The study concerns 200 students and 10 EFL teachers of academic lyceum under UzSWLU.

The procedure went in two steps. The first step: Questionnaire (among 3rd course students of our lyceum)

The second step: Interview among teachers (15 ELT teachers working in our lyceum were involved). In the questionnaire 200 of our gradulators participated. They were asked questions related to the university that they are going to enter, the entrance

exams, preparation and their English classes at lyceum.

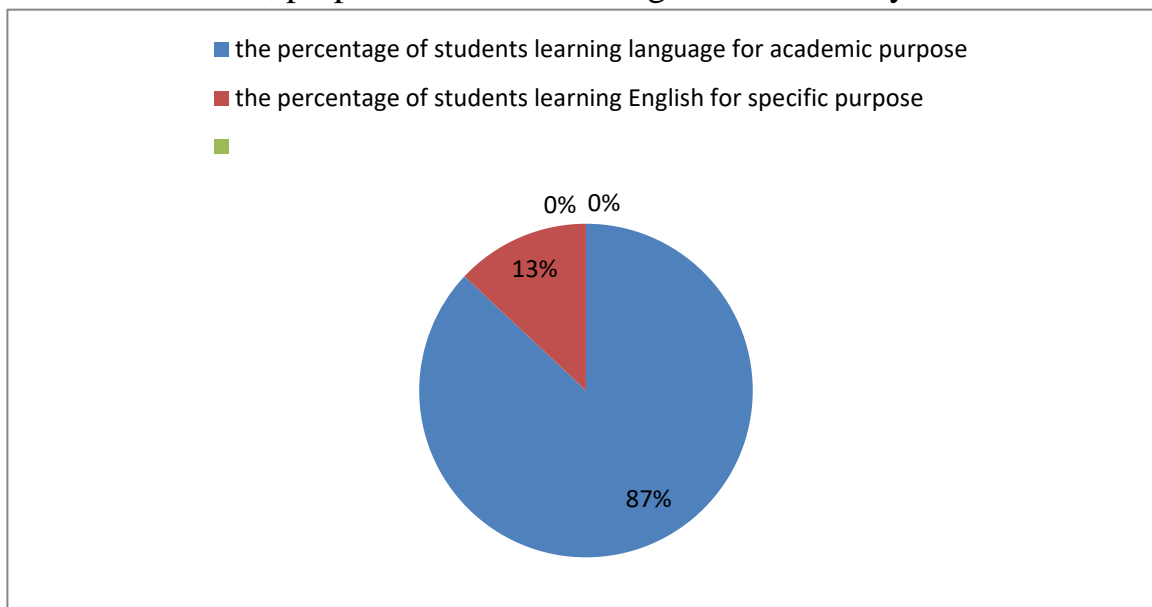


Figure A

According to questionnaire more than 80% percent of students in our lyceum are learning English to be enrolled whether the state or international universities whereas less than 15% percent learn it for specific purpose

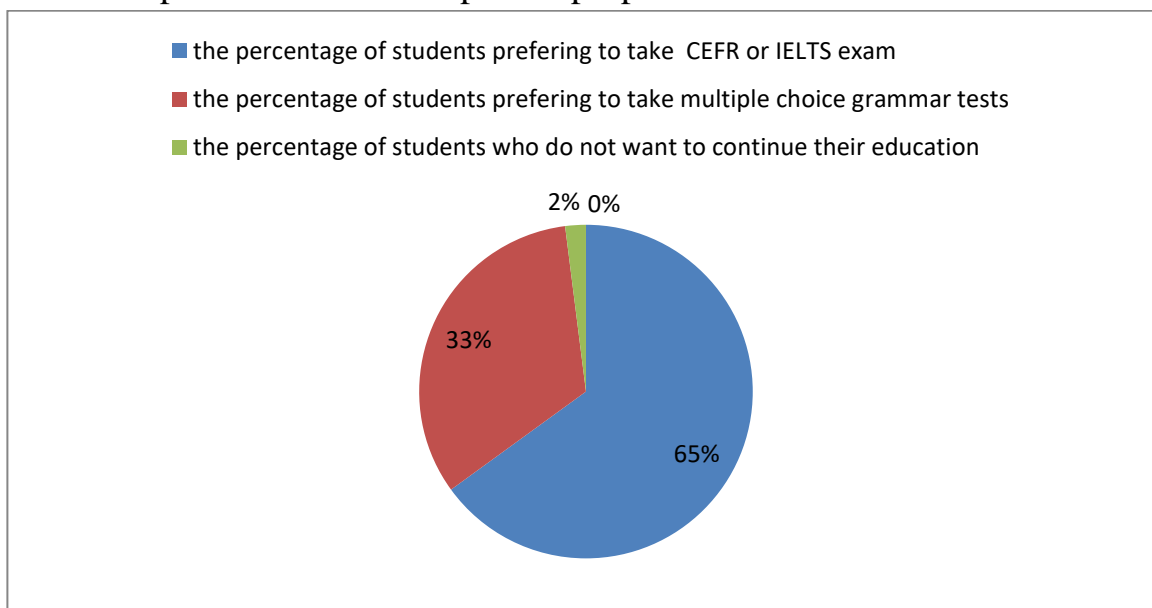


Figure B

RESULTS

Based on the collected data we can say that majority of students learn English for educational purpose and would prefer to take exams whose questions designed to evaluate students' level and competence. 65% of students state that both in classes and in private tutoring they learn listening, reading, writing and speaking so that they could get certificates enabling them to be admitted to the university. They do not usually do

grammar tests during EFL classes except to learn some grammatical structures which help them in writing. As our lyceum is considered to be a lyceum with a language profile more and more students prefer to continue their further education both in state universities and foreign universities. It can be natural that they would prefer to take tests designed to evaluate their 4 language skills rather than their grammar and vocabulary skill. The 35% of the students' state that they have already taken commercialized language tests and gained international and national certificates. However, 33% of students claim that they are learning and doing grammar tests because they think it is the most reliable system provided by the government, being free from different changes compared to certificates.

The next step of data collection was an interview held among the 15 EFL teachers of academic lyceum under UzSWLU. 10 of EFL teachers have 10 years experience, 3 of them have international experience and 6 of them have national CEFR certificates. According to standard and curriculum set for secondary education, they are supposed to teach in CLT method.

Teacher 2,3,7 stated:” *Of course it is challenging to teach both in CLT and grammar translation method, yet it is the thing that we are doing in class we cannot teach grammar in an integrated way since both we and students are aware that they come across with these kinds of grammar-oriented tests on placement exams. Moreover, their parents are also asking us to help their children to do well at exams and focus on preparing their children to universities. As one of our main goals is to assist students to continue their education, we sometimes have to teach based on their needs. Of course, there are some students who would prefer to continue their education abroad and would prefer to be taught in CLT method. Therefore, there is a dilemma that makes us teach in both methods to meet students' need.*”

These are problems that more and more teachers tend to come across nowadays. Despite the fact that standard and curriculum principles require teachers to implement CLT method, while due to the exam frame, parents and students require to be taught in grammar translation method. As a consequence, teachers have to still apply for grammar tests in classroom which may disturb a student preparing for CEFR based tests. If exam tests were also designed in a communicative way, students would realize that what they learn in class will be something they may come across in the exams and will possess a positive wash-back in terms of assessment. Furthermore, since higher education is considered to be important parents would urge their children to learn 4 language skills as well as grammar so that they could enter the university and become qualified. It, consequently would serve to develop the role of CLT throughout the republic.

The teachers also added: “ ... *Multiple choice on grammar used in entrance exams are considered to be practical which means easy to check. Who will check the writing and assess the speaking if the government implements communicative testing instead of grammar tests? Again, teachers will be involved to evaluate the stuff. Yet, the question is whether teachers throughout the republic are ready to assess these skills or not. It is time and money consuming process.* ”

It is obvious that every assessment tool is supposed to meet the criteria set for assessment. According to Brown (2010), tests should go through within 5 principles. They are:

- practicality
- validity
- reliability
- authenticity
- wash-back

If we analyze multiple choice tests on grammar, they meet only one principle-practicality that is easy to check and administer. What about other criteria? If we implemented communicative testing which includes assessing learners' ability of reading, listening, writing, speaking, it would be valid which means that assessment is build up based on what students have learned at school and lyceum program. As a result, students may have positive wash-back as they get aware of the correlation between the entrance exams and what they learn at school and get motivated to learn program school or lyceum provide. In addition, due to huge range of different tasks that can be used outside the classroom, communicative testing can be authentic, compared to multiple choice grammar tests that tend to be used just inside classroom. Finally, multiple choice grammar tests lack of reliability as they do not provide consistency because of options students usually have while doing this test whereas variety of tasks used in communicative testing may give an opportunity to assess students' real ability. Of course, there will be need for teachers to assess students' writing and speaking performance. However, the number of teachers having international experience and different certificates on language proficiency has been increasing nowadays. For example, more than 100 students studying at Webster university opened in Tashkent for Masters of art have a chance to familiarize with international experience regarding to curriculum development, ESOL methods, assessment, language policy being educated by professors and doctors having international experience. Throughout the years, the number of teachers who can be involved as an expert in the university exam will increase.

Teachers 1,4,5,6,8,9 state: “*The communicative competence is that what is needed nowadays. It is high time students begin to learn languages to exchange information,*

to have an access to international relations in terms of economy, education, science. If we changed the way we teach, we must change the assessment as well. Why do we have to teach using one method and assess our students using another method? It would be better to apply communicative testing in entrance exams and the role of speaking and writing will increase. Students will begin communicating using English as they know they will encounter with speaking in admission tests and it will serve as a “push” to learn school program eliciting communicative skills. Now we have some commercial tests like national CEFR which enables students entering the university without taking an exam on English, but it is held only two or three times a year.”

As Kheng and Baldauf (2011) states the English is the most frequently used language to exchange socio economic ecology, to publish international articles related to science, to conduct international conferences. If we want to survive in the era of globalization, we have to facilitate our students to be able to use the language for different purposes. Just implementing the method by the government will not give perspectives-we have to make our students feel responsibility and necessity to learn how to use and perform in foreign language. The implementation of new communication-based tests assessing students’ ability to perform in foreign language can assist students to acquire these skills.

DISCUSSION

Having analyzed the process of assessment we put forward the following recommendations:

implementing a new communicative testing system on the basis of CEFR, instead of multiple choice questions on grammar in placement test since it can give us a chance to assess learners’ ability of using foreign language. This kind of test tend to be time consuming so the test for foreign languages can be held separately on another day from other tests on other academic subjects. At the beginning it would be advisable to implement this kind of tests in the universities with language profile- that are specialized in foreign language teaching. For example, in UzSWLU, the exam on English should be based on assessing applicants’ listening, reading, writing, speaking and grammar vocabulary competence. This is mainly because the fact that this kind of prestigious universities with the language profile should admit students who are able to interact with the language and use it for their needs as they are future teachers who can make contribution to the development of CLT method in Uzbekistan.

enhancing teacher training courses so that more and more teachers do not only get some knowledge about how to teach effectively in CLT, but also to find out how to assess effectively using communicative testing in formative and summative assessment. This is mainly due to the fact that after implementing communicative testing teachers will have to get rid of using grammar-translation method to need their

students need related to entrance exams and have to design formative and summative assessment they use in school or lyceum in communicative testing way. Moreover, more and more teachers will be needed to check students' writings and assess their speaking skills. As we know, unlike the multiple questions on grammar, administering these tests are considered to be a little challenging in terms of practicality. They are not easy to check. Therefore, we will need more and more experienced teachers to assess students' performance.

Publishing different test-books that students may use independently to be able to pass entrance exams. Nowadays there is some limitation in implementing different foreign textbooks into lessons in our country. Despite the fact that new books designed in teaching and learning communicative skills are published, there is still need for some test books that can be used independently for preparation to entrance exams.

CONCLUSION

After conducting an analysis, it can be determined that the material covered during lectures should align with the content evaluated in examinations. The initial rationale for implementing communicative testing as part of our entrance examination lies in its alignment with the core tenets of assessment.

The notion of validity asserts that students ought not to encounter ambiguity or uncertainty pertaining to their academic preparation when seeking admission to tertiary education institutions. Specifically, the content covered in class ought to align with that which is assessed in examinations. It is imperative that students become proficient in the areas of reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills, and subsequently be evaluated using a suitable and credible assessment instrument for each of these skillsets.

The application of communicative testing in test design facilitates the achievement of reliable outcomes via the utilization of diverse tasks. The utilization of multiple choice questions in grammar tests proves insufficient in assessing the authentic aptitude of learners..

The utilization of authenticity real-life-based solely within the classroom or examination setting, as its practical implementation extends into diverse real-life situations.

Washback, a term commonly used in the field of education, pertains to the impact of testing on learners' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In this context, learners are expected to have a firm grasp of the learning objectives and receive a favorable washback effect, which motivates them to perform well in class and ultimately achieve good results in examinations.

Nonetheless, the implementation of communicative testing during entrance exams does come with a set of obstacles.

Initially, in contradiction to multiple-choice items, constructed response questions may present challenges in feasibility due to the increased duration required for examination delivery and assessment of completed assessments. A potential solution to this matter would be to conduct a distinct assessment of the foreign language section of the examination, independently from other academic subjects that are subject to automated machine grading techniques.

Furthermore, it is imperative that additional instructors are engaged to evaluate the written and oral proficiency of students. Possible rewrites: - One potential remedy for these issues is the monetization of the English assessments that are ubiquitous in numerous other nations. - The resolution to these predicaments lies in the commercialization of the English examinations that are commonplace in many foreign jurisdictions. - To address these dilemmas, one possible course of action would be to commodify the English tests that are widely administered in various other countries. The fee remitted for the examination serves the purpose of expediting certain technological provisions and coordinating communicative assessments.

The alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment can facilitate attainment of the desired language learning objectives. If the evaluations accurately reflect the material covered in educational instruction, students are inclined to experience a sense of ease, inspiration, and reinforcement in their pursuit of knowledge, as they recognize the congruity between the pedagogical approach and testing measures. Consequently, alongside the correlation of assessment principles, such as validity, authenticity, and reliability, in our testing practices, the instructional role of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach may witness an upsurge in all educational institutions across the republic. It is possible to enhance and reinforce the confidence in the uniformity of education within our nation, not only among our citizenry, but also worldwide among experts of an international stature.

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