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**Making of New Methods for Alternative Assessment and Evaluation
in Indian Context: A Perspective**

Md. Motiur Rahman, Ph.D.

Abstract

The present paper deals with an alternative personal-response assessment, which in conformity with the learner-centered principles, treats assessment as an integral part of teaching in formative evaluation. Alternative assessment also promotes the atmosphere of confidence so that students that are affected by evaluation become involved in its process. Assessment becomes a diagnostic mechanism for providing the efficiency of the teaching method. Furthermore, it helps students to demonstrate that they are making progress in language skills development, which can encourage their motivation to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and promote autonomy and independent language learning skills.

However, a teacher's role is not less significant in teaching process. They are prompted to communicate freely and are more able to engage in self-criticism and rethinking. Students' involvement in assessment assists them in achieving mellowness and responsibility in making progress in language learning process.

A new alternative method called self-assessment has been applied for NLLT (National Level Language Test 2010) at the National Testing Service-INDIA (NTS-INDIA) Centre for Testing and Evaluation, Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore. It really

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challenges teachers to introduce a new method of assessment and evaluation to students. The analysis showed that achievements in improving alternative assessment and evaluation language skills must come from a student himself / herself.

Key words: assessment, self-assessment, evaluation, language learning, achievements, teaching.

Self-assessment

The last two decades have witnessed a notable shift from structural teaching methods to communicative, humanistic and learner-centered approaches. Self-assessment is needed to assist teachers in making decisions about students' achieved linguistic abilities. Therefore, self-assessment becomes a diagnostic tool that provides feedback to a learner and a teacher about the suitability of the language course program and effectiveness of teaching methods.

Students are expected to develop a sense of responsibility and initiative in self-assessment when studying the language. Motivation is the first important aspect which matters the most. Students are often passive in their approach to the process of learning, and become demotivated if they cannot see any apparent progress in their acquisition of language skills. So, involving students in the assessment and evaluation process as self-directed learners is an essential part of balanced assessment. Students need to examine their own work and think about what they do well and in which areas they still need help. They can compare their work and create evaluation criteria for achieved results. Students learn the qualities of good work, how to judge their work and their own efforts of achievement in language learning and how to set personal goals. They develop the habit of self-reflection.

Within this context, teachers are seen as helpers and organizers. The teacher's role is no longer limited to the traditional role of the transmitter of knowledge. Good teachers always encourage learners to think for themselves and take control of their own learning process. The accountability for promoting students' achievements in improving language learning process belongs to the teacher. Language teachers are faced with the responsibility of deciding which testing methods are the most appropriate for language education. Traditionally, the teacher is the one who knows all. (Reilly, 2001)

Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

According to McNamara (2000) and Shaaban (2001), new forms of language assessment may not involve the challenge of a test performance under time limits and support learners to master the language in an anxiety-reduced environment. A student is seen as a centre in achieving quality in higher education when describing educational process as being of high quality (Barnett, 1992). With the changes in education the nature of testing has changed over the years to become less formal, more humanistic, formed in the mind not so much to catch people out on what they do not know, but a more neutral assessment of what they do (McNamara, 2000).

Recently the so-called “**alternative-assessment**” has stressed the usefulness of a variety of innovative testing procedures including portfolios, self-assessment, peer-assessment, conferencing, diaries, etc. (Norris, 2000). As a matter of fact, as regards language teaching in Indian context, the current trends in language teaching in any College or University or an Institution in India put more emphasis on self-assessment as one of the fundamental elements of self-directed language learning process.

There are several reasons for using student self-assessment. It promotes an attitude of inquiry where students have an active relationship to the material, consideration of the meaning and relevance of the tasks. It provides opportunities for students to express the relationships between course material, and combine quantitative and qualitative assessment of their language skills. It encourages students to reflect on process of learning and teaches them to engage in a self-directed process (Baron, 2004). It is an opportunity for learners to assess their own progress.

On the other hand, evaluation is a modern term in the area of testing. In the book *An Introduction to Evaluation Terminology* (Subbiah, 2008), the term evaluation has been defined as the judgment of performance as a process or result of change. Subbiah writes:

In other words, it is the method of testing, appraising, judging achievement, growth, product, development, or changes in these, through the use of formal and informal tests and techniques. Here if there is no evaluation, no quality can be assured. The process of evaluation is comprehensive in conception and application. It represents a broad concept that may be distinguished from the concerns of measurement, judgment, and assessment in that the final operations can form the base for evaluation, but not the reverse. (Subbiah: 2008, p. 72)

Gronlund (1976) an educationist, defines evaluation as a systematic process of determining the extent to which the pre-determined objectives are achieved. It is also clarified as the process of making value judgment based on factual information or evidence.

According to Ebel (1979), evaluation is “a judgment of merit, sometimes based solely on measurements such as those provided by test scores, but more frequently involving a synthesis of various measurements, critical incidents, subjective impressions, and other kinds of evidence”.

Another evaluation process described by Harris (1997) in his research the process of evaluation is Learners simultaneously create and undergo the evaluation procedure, judging their achievement in relation to themselves against their own personal criteria, in accordance with their own objectives and learning expectations.

However, there is also a possibility that students do not perceive the significance and necessity of self-assessment in their achievements of language learning. Our aim or objective should be to prove that students’ self-assessment can help students to be more active to judge their performance in developing their language skills in the process of language learning. It can

benefit learners to locate their own strengths and weaknesses and get them to think about what they need to do in order to achieve progress.

The present system of assessment and evaluation for Schools, Colleges and Universities education in India are based on process of examination only. Therefore, it focuses only on cognitive learning outcomes and in the process co-curricular domains are neglected, even though co-curricular areas are an equally important and significant part of intrinsic development of students. Even in curricular areas the focus is on rote learning and memorization, characterized by a neglect of higher mental abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving and creative ability.

Assessment for better learning process can take various forms such as **Self-assessment**, which enables students to monitor their own progress against specific objectives and evidence from their own work. **Peer assessment**, which helps to improve learning and to develop social and cooperative skills. **Teacher's assessment**, in which progress and strengths are acknowledged, difficulties diagnosed and strategies to conquer them planned.

Types of Assessment and Evaluation

There are three types of assessment and evaluation that occur regularly throughout the schools, colleges and universities during the academic year: diagnostic, summative, and formative.

Diagnostic assessment and evaluation usually occur at the beginning of the school, college and university year and before each unit of study. The purposes of this assessment include determining students' knowledge and skills, their learning needs, and their motivational and interest levels. By examining the results of diagnostic assessment, teachers can determine where to begin instruction and what concepts or skills to emphasize.

Diagnostic assessment provides information essential to teachers in selecting relevant learning objectives and in designing appropriate learning experiences for all students, individually and as group members. Keeping diagnostic instruments for comparison and further reference enables teachers and students to determine progress and future direction. Diagnostic assessment tools such as the Writing Strategies Questionnaire and the Reading Interest/Attitude inventory guide can provide support for instructional decisions.

Summative assessment is usually carried out at the end of a course or academic session to assign the students grade. It involves judging overall competence and sometimes assigning grades, levels or scores to individual pupils. Formative assessment is usually carried out throughout the academic session also known as educative assessment. The main purpose of this kind of assessment is to aid the process of teaching and learning.

Results and Discussion

NTS-INDIA (National Testing Service), Center for Testing and Evaluation, CIIL (Central Institute of Indian Languages), Mysore conducted NLLT-2010 (National Level Language Test) examination of Higher Secondary/Graduate levels through Regional Field Units for Testing and Evaluation in different states for these three languages.

The present analysis deals with the students' individual opinion and ideas reflecting on their language learning process, and measuring their knowledge in achieving good results in academic performance in Indian languages. The students assessed their skills and abilities in speaking, listening, reading, writing and grammar individually and also in the context of studies during class activities. The students' positive and negative opinions about the acquired language learning skills have been analyzed.

During the term students did much reading and as they wrote they improved this skill. Reading has helped students not only in promoting language learning but also improvement in emotional intelligence, which is one of the most important aspects in academic achievements. Through learning and preparing for discussion regularly, being active during the lectures, students developed self-confidence during speaking activities and made significant achievements in pronunciation.

Judging by the results of the analysis, they have improved speaking skills with the help of preparing and presenting reports. Each work and task demanded responsibility. Listening to my classmates I could enrich my vocabulary and listening skills. Presentations are very important for assessment because they cover a wide range of meaningful activities and can provide a comprehensive record of student's abilities in both oral and written performance. (Shaaban, 2001)

The students' conferences were an effective informal way of assessing the students' progress in language learning skills. They provided opportunities for interactions where the teacher learned about students' communicative abilities, emotional and social well-being. Recent trends in language teaching methodology have stressed the need to develop students' ability to work cooperatively with others in groups. Students can evaluate encouraging each member of their team emphasizing their positive contribution to team-work (Shaaban, 2001).

The Portfolio

The purpose of a portfolio in the context of language learning is to exhibit the extent of a student's communicative competence through samples. Portfolio traces a student's improvement over time, it is imperative that revisions and drafts would be included and all samples be dated (Subbiah, 2008). The students compared their work over time, created evaluation criteria for achievement in language learning, discussed their strategies for attending lectures, enhanced knowledge, analyzed mistakes and judged their progress in the developed language skills.

Problems with Word Order

One of the most complicated tasks for the students was writing: wrong word order was the most frequent mistake along with confused tenses and wrong prepositions/ postpositions. Grammar tests were the most stressful activity for the students. They did not feel confident in their knowledge of grammar rules in applying them into practice. NTS-INDIA has conducted NLLT-2010 (National Level Language Test) examination for three languages such as Tamil, Hindi and Urdu in various RFU's (Regional Field Unit).

Problems with Sentence Construction

The analysis of Urdu Answer scripts for NLLT-2010 examination conducted by NTS-INDIA showed lack of student knowledge and awareness. For example

“əb jaʔr log Urdu mei bhi ʔəzəl ʔoiʔ ʃru:ʔ kar čuke hæ. ham ek təsvir dekh rahe hū. ləRkiyā mādan mei khel rəhe the aur laRke dekh rəhe the. Vəh Imtehan lIkħ kər aya hæ. Urdu zUban ek ʃirī hæ jo əmən kI ʔərəf rayl b karti hæ or Us se ədəb mIlta hæ or yəh mohəbbət ka pəyām dete hæ. Urdu ek mIljuli zUban hæ”

Now poets have also started saying ghazal in Urdu language. I am looking at a picture. Girls were playing in the ground and boys were looking. He came after written exam. Urdu language is a sweet that it gives for peace of persuaded and it's getting a literature, and it gives to message of love. Urdu is a mix language.

In the above data there are many grammatical and lexical errors and these are commonly found in the responses of various RFU's students.

Test Results

Time limit set for the tests was found to cause difficulty in achieving better results. Some students confessed being passive learners. They did not know how to their achievements in the use of language skills. The students were aware of the importance of motivation in learning any language; however, they did not demonstrate much interest and initiative in putting extra efforts to prepare for the lectures. The students were not as active as the teachers expected them to be. At the beginning of the term the students were not used to self-assessment strategy, but at the end of the semester/ session the learners were able to reflect and evaluate their own development.

Chart 1: The results of the students' self-assessment in developed skills

Percentage of Language Skills

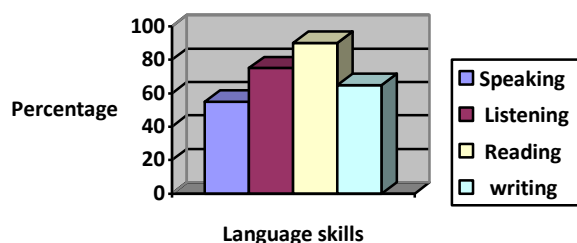
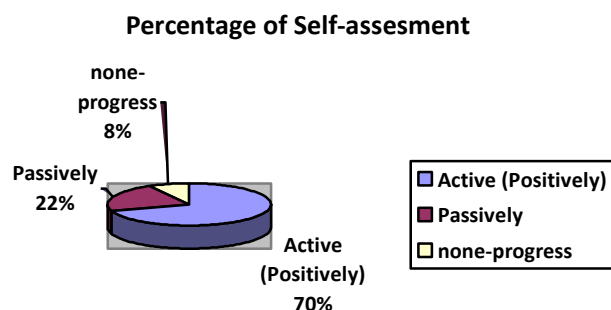


Chart 1 presents the students' assessed skills in developing speaking. They scored only about 55%, for the learners have not been as active as they have been asked to. Listening skills make about 75%, as the majority of the students have understood the material presented to them for listening. The rest have had difficulties in understanding. Reading skills have been rated best at 90%. On the other hand, grammar and writing skills scores stood at about 65%. The students have had problems with reviewing grammar.

Chart 2: The students' judgment of their progress in the language skills. It is presented diagrammatically as follows.



We see from the above pie chart showing the results of self-assessment of achievements in the language skills that 70% of the students evaluated their skills positively; 22% of the students were passive learners who just aimed at passing the exam, and the rest 8% of the students regretted not having worked and not having made much progress in the language skills.

Conclusions

The method of self-assessment in the language skills for student is rewarding, meaningful and affective when perceived individually. Students' self-assessment is a realistic practical tool in any classroom. It promotes students' autonomy and independent language skills, makes students more active in judging their own progress and encourages them to see the value of what they have learned and help students achieve their goal.

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