Taking Assessment Forward:
A Milestone in English Language Learning

Sheeba Manodh
Assistant Professor, Valliammai Engineering College, Kattankulathur
Ph.D. Scholar (Part Time) Department of English
Anna University, Guindy, Chennai -600025
absh_19@yahoo.co.in

==

Abstract

This paper provides a framework for conceptualising the idea of putting to use classroom assessments to bring about substantial changes in learning English. Assessment is an important factor to find out whether the educational practices are really effective .It is of considerable interest to English teachers to develop the practise of regular classroom evaluation in order to bring the best outcome from their learners. One could obviously guess that this type of assessment could serve complementary functions. Most of our students in the classrooms, we know, are inhibited by their fear of the English language. Being more of an informal kind of evaluation, this method dilutes the rigidness and severity of the concept of assessment. A great deal of information can be gathered about students' attitude, knowledge and understanding of the subject that he is learning. The results from these assessments are reliable and valid because of their direct relation to classroom instructional goals.

Introduction

Education is regarded as the most important vital public service of all. But measuring its effect is an arduous task which has baffled educators of all times. Assessment is essential to help individuals to receive the educational support they need to succeed, to see, whether the educational methods are really effective. Evaluation needs to become a support factor for learning rather than an impediment. The goal of language education is "cognitive academic linguistic proficiency" (Cummins 1979). Language evaluation need not be limited to achievement with respect to a particular syllabus but must be reoriented to measurement of language proficiency. Successful learning cannot occur without high quality assessment. Assessment has to be entwined in the process of teaching and learning. Assessments need to be designed in such a manner that it becomes powerful means of influencing the quality of what teachers teach and what students learn. The purpose of assessment is to serve and motivate and not to discourage or demoralize the students.

What Is Classroom Assessment?

Classroom assessment helps teachers to evaluate their students better as it helps in a systematic process of gathering and processing information extracted from the performance of the

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 19:3 March 2019**
Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M.Chithra Editors. *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*
Sheeba Manodh, Taking Assessment Forward: A Milestone in English Language Learning   79

students. Teachers assess for many purposes because they must take many decisions throughout the day. Assessments in the classrooms occur for three major domains.

a.   Cognitive domain: This encompasses intellectual activities such as memorising, interpreting, applying knowledge, solving problems and critical thinking.
b.   Affective domain: This involves feelings, attitudes, values interests and emotions.
c.   Psychomotor domain: This includes physical activities and actions.

Classrooms are complex social settings where students interact with each other in many ways. At the primary level, the aim of learning English must be to build familiarity with the language in meaningful situations. According to Rutherford 1987;18 "There is at least one characteristic that is common to every successful language learning experience we have ever known and that is that the learner is exposed one way or the another to an adequate amount of the data of the language to be learned". The emphasis must slowly shift from mastery of learning of this limited input to regular exposure to a variety of meaningful language inputs.

Maximum language acquisition can happen at the initial learning phase without the deliberate attempt on the part of the learner. But it is necessary that the teachers-in-charge are able to identify and evaluate the level of language acquisition of their students in an informal manner. Thus, a regular monitoring process will slowly generate interest in learners to acquire the language. The input received by the learner during this period serves as a base for attempts at early language production. At the school level, action rhymes, simple plays or skits and story reading can promote the students' experiment with language and its performance. Regular and sustained exposure needs to be ensured along with continuous feedback about comprehensibility.

Prabhu (1987) describes a task-based methodology that leads to the "negotiation of meaning and meaning focussed activity" in the classroom. The classroom, one must remember is not a laboratory. It has to be sensitive to individual learning styles .The learning styles of the students will have to be taken into consideration .In order to create conditions suitable for learners to language and to engage in a learning process, the classroom environment needs to be congenial .A need to communicate must be created in the classroom, which brings into play not only the target language resources but all the other resources have at their disposal. For e.g. conjecture, gesture, knowledge of conventions, numeracy and the mother tongue. (Prabhu 1987:29)

It is very important for the students to know about the progress that they are making in class. This feedback can give a positive wash back which in turn will certainly motivate the learners. The teacher could maintain a neat record of the students' performance which could be shared with the students after regular intervals of time. This gives the students the opportunity to reflect and ponder upon his or her learning process. The teacher must compulsorily discuss the answers and give regular feedback to the students. This could help the students to realise that they have or have not achieved the objectives. Such informal records are genuine evaluation reports when compared to the grades and scores which they score. This report could be used for self-evaluation. But it is a more useful

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **19:3 March 2019**
Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M.Chithra **Editors.** *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*
Sheeba Manodh, Taking Assessment Forward: A Milestone in English Language Learning   80

tool for the teacher who can use it to assess the pupils' progress. This will help the students to develop a positive attitude towards the language. It is important that the young learners have an opportunity to think about how the language is learnt.

At a later level, the attainment tests can be introduced. But we need to remember that the main aim of these tests should not be only to label the pupils in terms of pass/fail but to collect information in order to check aspects of learning that are difficult to assess by class room observation alone. This will enable the teacher to have a direct view of the pupil's achievements. These results can be used as a basis to plan the future classes. For e.g. by highlighting aspects of the language the pupils were thought to have mastered, but in fact they still have difficulty with. These tests will unfold to the teacher the students who are not keeping with the rest of the class and who may need extreme help. The tests must necessarily reflect subject of study and the type of activities that are done normally in class. These tests are the quantitative element of the evaluation process.

The other categories that the teacher should evaluate the students in order to analyse them thoroughly are:
  (i)   Communicative abilities and uses of English
  (ii)   Attitude towards learning
  (iii)   Behaviour in Classroom
  (iv)   Socio-cultural and Inter- curricular themes.

On the basis of all the assessment made, the teacher arrives at certain decisions like the following:
- Which students will be assessed and why?
- What will be the focus of the assessment?
- What assessment strategies will be used?
- How will the information be recorded?
- What patterns emerge on the basis of evidence collected? What does this tell me about the child's learning?
- What is the best way to report the information?
- How will I use this information to inform my teaching?

At the primary level, many teachers use observation, work samples and self-evaluation as tools in the process of assessment and evaluation.

During various classroom activities, students demonstrate what they think, know and can do. They are able to demonstrate the application of long processes and learning strategies.
A great deal of information can be gathered about the student's attitudes and knowledge and understanding by talking to students. Dialogues can provide a wealth of information about students and their learning. But, unfortunately, such informal observations are not considered standard evaluation results.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **19:3 March 2019**
Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M.Chithra Editors. *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*
Sheeba Manodh, Taking Assessment Forward: A Milestone in English Language Learning   **81**

If it has to be accepted by parents and the management, the teachers will have to effectively record data gathered in this way. When observational data is recorded, it can give concrete evidence of students learning.

The various strategies that could be used to record data are:

(a) <u>Anecdotal records</u> – they are short narrative description of observations in the classroom. These anecdotal comments should lead to interpretation and recognition of patterns of learning that emerge cover time.

Students' progress ought to be monitored on a regular basis and has to be communicated to the students at regular intervals. Development in language learning cannot be conveyed by letters, grades, symbols and marks.

Words like satisfactory, good and very good are too clichéd to be used in the present time. Teachers must be able to frame better phrases to explain their thoughts about the performance of the students.

Teachers who put in those extra miles in their assessment process can provide valid corrective instructive and help students to demonstrate success in their long learning process.

The assessments which are best suited to guide improvements in student learning are the quizzes, tests, writing assignments which teachers administer on a regular basis in their class rooms. The results from these tests can be trusted because of their direct relation to classroom instructional goals. They are easy to analyze at the individual student level. But if these assessments are to be used to bring in improvements they ought be viewed differently and interpreted in other ways. Teachers would have to see their assessments as an inevitable part of their teaching process.

(b) <u>Checklists</u>: A checklist is a written list of performance criteria. When the teacher observes the students' performance, she determines whether the performance or the product meets each performance criterion included in the checklist. When it does, a checkmark is placed next to the criterion. The checklists are diagnostic, reusable and capable of charting student progress. These types of checklists provide a very clear and vivid record of the student performances. The teachers must discuss about these records of the students with the students to enable them to know where improvement is required. It provides diagnostic information. Using the same checklists more than once is an easy way to obtain information about a students' improvement over time. However, checklists are not a failproof method to assess a students' performance thoroughly. There are a few limitations. Checklist provides the teacher with only two options for each criterion; performed or not performed. There is no middle ground for scoring. It is difficult to summarize a students' performance into a single score.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 19:3 March 2019**
Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M.Chithra Editors. *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*
Sheeba Manodh, Taking Assessment Forward: A Milestone in English Language Learning   82

(c)   Rating Scales: Rating scales help the observer to judge a performance along a continuum than as a dichotomy. It provides a broader range of scores. A judgement by the teacher determines the grades. Rating scales provide a range of categories for assessing a students' performance and thereby provide detailed diagnostic information.

(d)   Rubrics: Rubric is a set of clear expectations or criteria used to help teachers and students focus on what is valued in a subject, topic or activity.

Robinson (1991, p. 46) maintains that methods might overlap and there is no such thing as a method. Therefore, lecturers need to remember that there is no perfect method and they can fine tune their methods based on the students' disciplines, needs and course objectives. It is also better to try to use innovative techniques to arouse the students 'interest and impede boredom. The important point is the purposeful and meaningful implementation of classroom activities because "different approaches will be appropriate in different settings." (Bunch 2006, p.299).

Assessments are always a much-debated topic where there are so many dos and don'ts. There are quite a number of limitations which could hinder the process of classroom assessments. For e.g. The lack of training for teachers, limited time period for learning and teaching process, practical difficulties faced by teachers in classroom and a varied range of students from different background. These limitations cannot be easily overlooked as they could prove to be stumbling blocks on the route to learning and evaluation. When we move on to the different phases of evaluation, formative assessment or continuous assessment that happens on a regular basis in classroom could certainly bring about best results in language learning which is the ultimate goal of a true English language teacher.

===

References

- Bachman, L.F. and Palmer, A.S.   "Language Testing in Practice". Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print
- Brown, J.D and T.D. Hudson. "The Alternatives in Language Assessment," TESOL Quarterly 32 (1998) Huerta Macias, A, "Alternative Assessment: Response to commonly asked questions". TESOL Journal (1995)
- Bunch, G.C. (2006), Academic English in the Seventh Grade Broadening the lens, expanding access. Journal of English for Academic purposes 4(2),353-367.
- Falchiko, Nancy "Improving assessment through student involvement: Practical solution for aiding learning in higher and further education. New York Routledge Falmer (2005)
- Frey, Bruce B. And Schmitt, Vicki L. "Coming to Terms with Classroom Assessment". Journal of Advanced Academics, Volume 18, Number 3, Spring 2007.
- Huerta Macias, A, "Alternative Assessment: Response to commonly asked questions". TESOL Journal (1995).
- Hughes, Arthur. "Testing for Language Teachers". Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **19:3 March 2019**
Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M.Chithra **Editors.** *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*
Sheeba Manodh, Taking Assessment Forward: A Milestone in English Language Learning   83

- Robinson, P.C. (1991) ESP Today: A Practitioners' guide. New York: Prentice Hall
- Russell, Michael and Airasian W, Peter. Classroom Assessment –Concepts and applications. McGraw Hill, 2012.
- Shohamy, Elana. "The Power of Tests: The Impact of Language Tests on Teaching and Learning". NFLC Occasional paper. Washington DC: National Foreign Language Centre, 1993. Print.

===

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 19:3 March 2019**
Prof. N. Lakshmana Perumal, Sheeba Manodh and M.Chithra Editors. *Effective Strategies, Innovative Methods & Integrated Pedagogical Approaches to Learning and Teaching English in Heterogenous Classrooms*
Sheeba Manodh, Taking Assessment Forward: A Milestone in English Language Learning   84