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EVALUATION OF STUDENT LEARNING: ESP VOCABULARY ACHIE-VEMENT TEST CONSTRUCTION

Assessment is widely used at all levels of language education and serves various purposes, such as measuring language proficiency, comparing student's achievement data to other students', placing learners in different groups depending on their level of proficiency, etc. Development of lexical knowledge is central to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching and learning and, as a result, vocabulary tests are being widely designed and administered for various purposes. Vocabulary assessments are developed by instructors in order to reflect the important points that have been taught and allow students to get the educational support they may need to succeed. Once a decision to develop a test has been taken, a blueprint of the test has to be designed. A blueprint should include a wide variety of fundamental characteristics that are relevant to vocabulary assessment such as purpose, context, and group of test takers [1]. Certain decisions must also be made about how vocabulary items are to be chosen, tested (separately from other constructs or embedded), and how the test outcomes are to be evaluated.

In order to deliver a successful vocabulary achievement test, it is necessary to identify the most crucial factors which affect the quality of any test in a positive or negative way: authenticity of tasks, validity, reliability, practicality and economy. Authenticity of tasks implies engagement of test-takers in various genuine tasks in which content specific knowledge and language ability interact in a way which resembles students' target language situation/use. A good test should be reliable and valid. Validity indicates whether an assessment tool measures what it intends to measure. With respect to this, content validity plays a vital role in ESP test construction. A test has content validity if the activities included cover a representative sample of the domain to be measured [1]. To ensure content validity and beneficial backwash, the most important thing is to choose widely from the whole area of content [3]. The information that is used in the test should be authentic, the level of difficulty of the items tested should be appropriate for the ability level of a particular group of ESP students. It is advisable to place together the items pertaining to a specific topic and test them simultaneously. Such a grouping will facilitate scoring.

A good test should provide consistent results, or, in other words, be reliable. To enhance reliability of the given test, it is important that the instructions to the test should be clear, context provided be unambiguous and test conditions be stable [2]. The test should assess a satisfactory amount of instances of correct comprehension and vocabulary usage. Students shouldn't be allowed too much freedom in the way they provide their answers. This contributes to greater reliability and objectivity of the test.

Achievement tests are meant to reflect students' progress, not failure, and help teachers to decide on changes to be made in the future teaching process. Students therefore shouldn't encounter any difficulties when being tested, in other words they should be familiar with the format of the exercises proposed, otherwise the test will not measure the results of the learning that actually took place. The majority of modern

ESP course books rest on the following kind of activities: multiple choice, graph description, banked gap-filling, derivation, reading comprehension and cloze-procedures.

J. Read identifies three dimensions that have particular relevance for designing and evaluating vocabulary assessments: discrete / embedded; selective / comprehensive; context-independent / context-dependent [4]. The "discrete – embedded" distinction addresses the issue of whether vocabulary is regarded as a separate construct or it is assessed as an embedded part of the larger construct of text comprehension. For example, vocabulary can be one of the instruments being rated separately in a larger construct of writing. The second dimension proposed by J. Read encompasses the range of vocabulary included in the assessment. If a test is compiled, for instance, in order to assess students' grasp of the vocabulary items in a particular content domain, the language sample will be selective as the main purpose of such tests is to see if students learned the words in that particular sample. In general, the smaller the set of words, the more selective the assessment is. Comprehensive vocabulary assessment, on the contrary, is based on the analysis of all the content words either in an input text or in the student's response to a test task. The third dimension is related to the context and its role in a vocabulary test. Two types of test distinction are based on this criterion: context-dependent and context-independent. A context-independent test measures vocabulary in isolation, i.e. without any reference to the linguistic context. Context-dependent vocabulary tests require the test-takers to make use of various contextual clues.

As seen from the above techniques, vocabulary assessment covers different formats in order to maintain students' interest and motivation. A test constructed should be as objective as possible. Objective tests, according to J. Read are the ones in which the material is divided into small units, each of them can be assessed by means of a test item with a single correct answer. Most commonly these are the multiple choice types of assessment. Multiple choice tests are extremely objective because they can be scored without any judgement on behalf of the scorer, have a great degree of reliability and cover a considerable amount of material related to the subject. Moreover "students often find multiple-choice questions less ambiguous than completion or true-false items. Instructors also find it easier to defend correct answers" [5].

ESP testing is challenging because of the close relationship between the content knowledge and the language knowledge. A progress achievement test is primarily designed to measure the students' progress and, according to A. Hughes [3], such a test should be based on objectives rather than detailed teaching and textbook content. Adapting this perspective towards an achievement test allows to get a true picture of what has actually been achieved by each individual student. Moreover, if test content and techniques are not at variance with the course objectives, the test is likely to have a positive backwash effect.

Test scores obtained are a valuable source of information for both a learner and a teacher. To a teacher, the results reveal how well the students have mastered the subject related material. Additionally, the test scores make it possible for a teacher to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching strategies he/she employs. To students, the test results uncover how much they know and what areas need further improvement. Test scores also allow students to adapt their learning strategies accordingly. Provided so many crucial decisions can be made based on the results evaluation, the process of test construction must be paid much attention to.

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ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' ACQUIRED SKILLS

The issue of assessing students' acquired skills has always been topical in foreign language teaching. Yet, now greater importance is attached to it in connection with the standardizing of the levels of training that has begun in higher school.

Teaching a foreign language in a technical institution of higher learning (known as Language for Specific Purposes) aims at the formation of future specialists' communicative competence that allows them to use a foreign language as a means of professional and intercultural communication. The university foreign language program is directed at training specialists' mainly practical needs in their future profession. These practical needs are formulated with view of communication, which is understood as profession-oriented training, and presupposes mastering all four types of speech activities on the basis of professional vocabulary. The main characteristic feature of this specific purpose language ability is that "specific purpose background knowledge interacts with language knowledge to produce a communicative performance in specific purpose contexts" [2, p. 33].

Teaching and assessment are two inseparable aspects of teacher's work, and numerous scholars point out that "performance assessment practices are part of any professional culture" [2. p. 172]. The importance of knowledge assessment is stressed by many scholars who regard evaluation "as an essential component of any training program" and emphasize that it helps "determine what and how much program participants have learned" [3, p. 89, 90]. The actual Model Program on the basis of which are designed Foreign Languages Teaching Programmes directly prescribes the availability of the Control Module.

Foreign language monitoring is essential for both a teacher (it helps improve the teaching process, substitute less effective methods for more effective ones, create favourable conditions for improving practical skills) and a trainee (helps each student realize what progress they have made, what their drawbacks are, what material they have to revise). Besides, the right, objective assessment is a stimulus for students' future work. Thus, the success of the whole foreign language teaching process in many respects depends on the thoroughly organized process of evaluating students' knowledge.