ТЕСТИРОВАНИЕ НАВЫКОВ ПИСЬМА У СТУДЕНТОВ, ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ИНОСТРАННЫЙ

TESTING WRITING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

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Проблематикой данной статьи является тестирование письма как вида речевой деятельности при изучении речевой деятельности при изучении английского языка. Рассматриваются вопросы восприятия студентами процесса оценки их письменных работ, а также соответствия критериев: оценки стандартам высших учебных заведений.

Ключевые слова: тестирование; оценивание; определение качества; достоверность; обоснованность.

The focus of this article is testing writing in the English language classroom the questions of how students perceive the process used to evaluate their written work, and what is acceptable by the standards of higher institutions and teachers are discussed.

Keywords: testing; assessment; evaluation; reliability; validity.

No English language teaching (ELT) program can deny or ignore the significance for testing for evaluating learners' acquisition of the target language. An important area of concern in testing is how students view their own achievements. Often students' expectations of test results differ from actual results. Students' grade expectations are often higher, which may negatively affect students' motivation. This situation calls for raising students' awareness of their abilities.

The focus of this article is testing writing in the English foreign language (EFL) classroom. The article concludes with implications for classroom teaching and testing.

Experience has shown teachers, researchers, and school administrators that, just like language itself, testing practices in ELT are not static but dynamic and changing. One controversial area is testing writing, which requires that test construction and evaluation criteria should be based on course objectives and teaching methodologies. In the English language classroom, especially at the high school and university levels, teachers are always challenged by how to reliably and validly evaluate students' writing skills, so that the students will be better prepared for internal and external

proficiency and achievement exams. Indeed, writing in the academic community is paramount; a student can't be successful without a certain level of academic writing proficiency.

Another question that many ELT programs are addressing is how do students perceive the process used to evaluate their work? Do they know how they are being tested and what is acceptable by the standards of higher institution and their teachers? To answer these questions it is necessary to differentiate between assessment and evaluation of writing and to present the main issues involved.

There are many reasons for testing writing in the English language classroom, including to meet diagnostic, proficiency, and promotional needs. Each purpose requires different test construction [1; 2]. Recent approaches to academic writing instruction have necessitated testing procedures that deal with both the process and the product of writing [3–5]. It is generally accepted by teachers and researchers that there are two main goals of testing: first, to provide feedback during the process of acquiring writing proficiency (also referred to as *responding* or *assessing),* and second, to assign a grade or score that will indicate the level of the written product (also referred to as *evaluating).*

The present study focuses on evaluating students' essays, that is, assigning scores in order to indicate proficiency level. Evaluation of writing in ELT has a long history, with various procedures and scoring criteria being revised and adapted to meet the needs of administrators, teachers, and learners [6–9]. For testing writing, reliability and validity, as well as the choice of topics and rater training, are important and must be addressed whatever the purpose of the testing situation may be [10–13].

Reliability is the degree to which the scores assigned to students' work accurately and consistently indicate their levels of performance or proficiency. Correlation coefficients of 80 and above between raters' scores (inter-rater reliability) as well as between the scores assigned by the same rater (intra-rater reliability) to the same task are considered acceptable for decision making [1, pp. 671-672]. There are some studies that indicates that the gender, background, and training of the rater can affect the reliability of scores [14, pp. 587-603; 17, pp. 197-223]. Thus, to maintain reliability many programs put heavy emphasis on the training of raters and as a result have obtained high positive correlations [10; 13].

Validity is the degree to which a test or assignment actually measures what it is intended to measure. There are five important aspects of validity [10; 13]:

1. Face validity Does the test appear to measure what it purports to measure?

2. Content validity Does the test require students to perform tasks similar to what they are normally required to do in the classroom? Does it sample these tasks representatively?

3. Concurrent validity Does the test require the same skill or sub-skills that other similar tests require?

4. Construct validity Do the test results provide significant information about a learner's ability to communicate effectively in English?

5. Predictive validity Does the test predict learners' performance at some future time? To what extent should teachers communicate these reliability and validity concerns to our students? Teachers' awareness of the issues of reliability and validity is crucial, but perhaps equally important is how accurately students perceive their own abilities and the extent to which they understand what is considered acceptable EFL writing at the university level.

Research in how students perceive their language abilities compared with faculty perceptions and actual performance indicates that there is a problem that needs to be addressed [11]. In a survey carried out by M. C. Pennington with students graduating from universities in the United Kingdom, results indicated that 42 of the 48 students rated their writing ability as very good or quite good. In contrast, the teachers did not indicate such confidence. There were similar findings in another study comparing student and faculty grade expectations with actual test scores [9].

If EFL students studying at the university level are deficient in academic language skills, a critical question is, to what extent are the students aware of their deficiencies? From the studies cited above, it appears they are not very aware of their deficiencies or, at best, seem to be more confident of their abilities — and thus hold higher grade expectations — than are warranted by their teachers' perceptions or by their actual test scores.

Students and their instructors usually have different perceptions of acceptable essay writing. This has important implications for writing evaluation in the university's EFL program. Teachers need to help students increase their awareness and understanding of the proficiency levels required in writing essays.

One way teachers can do this is by showing their students sample essays, perhaps drawn from the students' own work, that represent each of the grade levels from poor to excellent. These model essays could be photocopied for the class so that they can be read and discussed in detail. Students could take part in practice evaluation sessions by assigning grades for each sample essay, including the three sub-skills: language, organization, and content, according to the criteria for essays used by the EFL program. Such practice evaluation could be done in small groups, with each group justifying the grades it assigns in short oral presentations to the rest of the class, followed

by questions and discussion. Once this exercise is done, the teacher could discuss the different grade ranges and comment on the grades assigned by the groups in light of what grades the essays would likely receive in a testing situation.

A second way to raise students' awareness of essay evaluation criteria is through individual or small group conferences held periodically with the teacher. In fact, although student-teacher conferences are carried out irregularly, they have been quite successful in the EFL program at the university, especially for lower proficiency level writers. Students become more involved in the evaluation process and more aware of what is expected in their essays, and thus realistically build confidence in their writing.

In addition to these awareness-raising activities, teachers need to revise periodically the writing criteria being used for essay evaluation in light of recent research and innovations in teaching writing. Teachers also might need to clarify criteria for the different proficiency levels for the various types of writing tasks assigned throughout a semester. Essay tests in certain rhetorical modes, such as narration or description, might require different evaluation criteria than those used for essays in the comparison or contrast mode. Although the essay tests included in this survey were from the end of the semester, teachers might want to consider whether they should evaluate essays written earlier in the course according to objectives covered up to that point.

Testing is an inextricable part of the instructional process. If a test is to provide meaningful information on which teachers and administrators can base their decisions, then many variables and concerns must be considered. Testing writing is undeniably difficult. Although we teachers try hard to help students acquire acceptable writing proficiency levels, are we aware that perhaps our students do not know what is expected of them and do not have a realistic concept of their own writing abilities?

Developing test procedures for more valid and reliable evaluation is necessary and important; however, it does very little to motivate students to continue learning if their perceived levels of performance are not compatible with those of their teachers. In addition to the need to develop valid and reliable testing procedures, teachers must not overlook the need to raise students' awareness of their abilities. It is perhaps only through this understanding that genuine learning occurs.

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ АУТЕНТИЧНЫХ ВИДЕОМАТЕРИАЛОВ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ СТУДЕНТОВ-ДИЗАЙНЕРОВ

THE USE OF AUTHENTIC VIDEO MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO DESIGN STUDENTS

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В статье рассматривается возможность использования аутентичных видеоматериалов при обучении английскому языку студентов-дизайнеров. Также проанализированы преимущества, критерии отбора материала такого рода, описаны этапы работы с ним.

Ключевые слова: аутентичные видеоматериалы; профессиональная терминология; обучение английскому языку; коммуникативная компетенция.

The article discusses the possibility of using authentic video materials in teaching English to design students. The advantages, criteria for selecting authentic material are also analyzed, the stages of work are described.

Keywords: authentic video materials; professional terminology; teaching English; communicative competence.