

THEME: Language Testing and Evaluation

TITLE: METHODOLOGY OF TESTING ENGLISH IN INDIA

KEY WORDS: ASSESSMENT, SUMMATIVE, FORMATIVE, PROFICIENCY, LANGUAGE SKILLS [L.S.R.W].

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ABSTRACT: The English evaluation pattern around the world has undergone a sea-change, yet in India, generally testing English follows the basic pattern of evaluation that is “**Summative**” form of evaluation in the undergraduate courses. When it comes to testing of English at the end of the semester or during the Mid term, it is Summative technique which is mostly taken up and it generally includes testing reading and writing skills due to many aspects.

To set a benchmark for testing the Second language learners’ competence in Indian scenario, this paper studies the “Formative” gauging technique which can be adopted as an holistic English language assessment tool. The paper explains as how beneficial a formative assessment can be and how to conduct it for testing all the four language skills.

Formative evaluations examine students’ communication to express personal experiences, outlook, abilities, interest, emotions, feelings, perception, comprehension, previous knowledge, finding out gaps, rearranging the lesson content in a course work.

Thus formative technique uniformly tests all the language skills [i.e.] listening, speaking, reading and writing to make the learners proficient and complement to the global standards.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER:

With all the motivation and investment in English, the Indian English language teaching faculty can test all the four language skills Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing equally rather than testing only the writing skills in the undergraduate courses in the end exams.

This will help the students to have a strong sway of English language which helps them to be successful in a fast-paced, competitive academic environment.

In the end, the most important objective of teaching English is to encourage students to demonstrate what they know and develop an aesthetic insight of the language.

INTRODUCTION: ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

English has gained importance as a **“Global Language”** and it is understood that half of the world is familiar with this language. Since English language is so widely spoken, many people believe that it is imperative to learn it as a second language in non-native speaking countries. In India English has its own distinctive importance. It has become an **“Intra-national language”** which links the different regional dialects to communicate at ease. In India with a multilingualism, English has enabled a common communication means between people of different backgrounds.

To compete with mind and matter in the international arena in different social, educational and cultural aspects, the Indian Parliament has recognized English as an official language in addition to Hindi and has been adopted into the National and State curriculum.

So keeping this in mind; driven by the demands of the society, the educational institutions embraced English Language as a second language.

Learning a new language involves the new alphabet and the four important skills [i.e.] listening, speaking, reading, writing. If you focus exclusively on just one activity, the others fall behind. This is actually a common pitfall for language learners.

At this juncture it becomes mandatory that learning of English as a second language in India should stand apt to all the standards. To measure English language competency the right measuring yard or accurate assessment should include assessing all the four language skills [i.e.] listening, speaking, reading and writing.

It has to be accepted by teaching fraternity that testing of listening and speaking skills do not go par with the remaining language skills. Testing of L & S skills is not structured properly and is given less importance because of many aspects.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Teaching, like learning, always ends with a question. When teachers have completed a lesson, they ask wh –questions based on the concept taught. This is evaluation. Evaluation leads to growth. This growth leads to improvement in future planning and implementation for both the teachers and learners..

The language skills cannot be mastered but regardless of the level of English proficiency, all students should have an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge or skills in the content being assessed. Assessment plays a variety of roles in the instruction of English language to the non-native learners. Assessing English learners requires attention to certain challenges, not encountered in most other assessment perspectives.

Testing all four skills, encourages learners to take a balanced approach to language learning, ensuring that the learners develop the ability to use the language effectively in the real world.

Accomplishment of an ESL teacher is in his/her effort in enabling the students to understand what is the concept taught by the teacher, depends on the strategies he/she applies and at the same time achievement of the student lies in his/her efficiency, ability to communicate in English for education, migration and for professional endorsement.

The English evaluation pattern around the world has undergone a sea-change in the years passed by, yet in India, testing language, largely follows the basic prototype of evaluation that is **“Summative”**.

Summative evaluation is designed to assess the total achievement of the learners during the end of a course, where the learners go for guessing questions from Question bank given by the faculty. This type of tests measure students at a particular point in the year. This evaluation does not reflect English language learning’s true substance nor the knowledge or abilities.

The real validation of the English language skills can be measured in an informal setting or pattern which is none other than **“Formative”** evaluation.

It is considered as one of the most important and convincing assessment, which is informal, an ongoing assessment, that provides a persistent snapshots of course work to monitor student learning through out their course of study.

While standardized tests measure students at a particular point in the year, formative tests are ongoing assessments. By using informal assessments, teachers can target students' specific problem areas, adapt instruction, and intervene earlier rather than later and provide a more well-formed picture of their skills, abilities, and ongoing progress.

PURPOSE OF THE TEST:

The English Tests at the end semester basically contemplate on the content testing rather than language testing. They are conducted to measure the students memory or recall ability but not the language skill which they are good at. Tests should treat students as individuals. e.g. a learner could be strong in reading, but weak in listening or writing or speaking.

Research has suggested that the ability to speak is distinct from the ability to read/listen/write (Powers 2010, Sawaki et al 2009).

Therefore, the best validation of testing English is to stimulate interest in expressing the students personal experiences, outlook, abilities, interest, emotions, feelings, perception, comprehension, previous knowledge, finding out gaps rearranging the lesson content in English in their own words..

The tests should help students to show originality and creativity of their work. It should give the student the scope of choice and preference in learning a language skill. The test should not trick or confuse the students and most importantly make them feel self-conscious or discouraging in not fitting themselves to the standard of well-versed.

SUGGESTED TESTING METHODS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR INDIANS LEARNERS

It is very important to keep in mind when designing and scoring the assessment, as well as when making decisions about testing accommodations think of the student as an individual distinctiveness, especially when we take into account the Indian students.

Grading English language learners by Formative assessment is effective as well as agreeable. With careful planning and knowing the standard of the students a teacher can design the test by covering all the language skills.

Students are better able to demonstrate what they know when given the opportunity to create and present what they are comfortable with, but at the same time the teacher should see that she/he correlates that activity with other language skills for over all language learning.

For instance, assign a project to the students. They must write a proposal for their project (writing), research the project (reading and writing), present their project to their peers (speaking), answer questions posed by their peers (listening and speaking), and complete a self-assessment (reading and writing).

It is suggested that Second Language Learners should have not only multiple opportunities, but also multiple ways to show what they know, and that assessment specifications should include a variety of response types. Even in the literature base, instead of testing the text-based literary knowledge by conducting written test, the enacting of the story would cover the remaining skills.

The four basic language skills have to be uniformly graded with a given set of points. Each skill has to be graded separately and given a separate score. The distribution of the marks should be equal for all the four skills. The average of all skills has to be computed and concluded and to be given as the final score grade. Just like the IELTS & TOEFL.

Some of the suggested tasks which can be incorporated to assess the language skills are:

LISTENING

In today's high-tech, communication is more important than ever, yet we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another.

Genuine listening has become a rare gift—the gift of time. In reality listening helps build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding, resolve conflicts and improve accuracy. At work, effective listening means wasting less time and working efficiently without any communication gap. At home, it helps develop resourceful, strengthens relationships for patient listening. Therefore listening builds friendships and careers.

When it comes to academics, as most of the institutions are equipped with smart technology students can improve listening skill and can be tested as well. Apart from Listening Comprehensions the below tasks can be taken up to test the listening skills.

Tweak the task according to the standard of your students.

- Guess who: Play some audios[speeches/talk] of famous personalities, ask them to listen carefully and then ask questions[orally or written]
- Mimic: Play some songs or tongue twisters or assonance words, ask them to repeat it, this will help the students to comprehend rhythmic or repetitive patterns.
- Blindfold walk: This exercise can help them to hear to the instructions carefully.[“go forward/ backwards three steps, turn left right or go straight”.]
- Sequential order: Read out a story or an incident or a procedure or a process and ask the students to put them in order.
- Audio clippings: Some audio tapes on conversations clippings can be played with a handout where multiple choice questions will be given, they need to listen, comprehend and choose the right answer.
- Role of a lyricist : Few rare songs can be played with blanks of lyrics missing which can be filled up by the students.
- Read Stories and Ask for Predictions:
- Guess the mate: Give the details of classmates and they have to guess the other classmate with the help of minute details.
- Giving Feedbacks: Read out an article or play some audios and ask the students to give their feedback.
- Mindless activities: Ask students to do some mindless activities like, arranging their bags, cleaning up the board, few physical exercises while listening to the audio, these activities though are distractions will allow the students to pay attention they know that you will be asking them questions.

- Telephonic conversations: Ask students to note down to the other person instructions on the phone.

Listening is a vital skill but it can be challenging to assess. Tailor make the scoresheets, or the worksheets give the clear picture of their attentiveness.

Let students give a self-feedback after the listening activity.

1. I stopped making eye contact with the speaker.
2. Asked the speaker to repeat because I was not focusing.
3. Misunderstood the meaning of speaker's message.
4. I let my mind drift while someone was speaking.
5. Jumped to a conclusion about what someone was saying.
6. I let my personal judgment crowd out the speaker's message.
7. Interrupted speaker or changed the subject in the middle of the conversation.
8. Reacted emotionally to what someone was saying before they finished.
9. Forgot important information (such as a person's name) while communicating with someone.

*** They have to zero down themselves with the distractors mentioned above.**

The above factors can be a feedback for the student listening activity.

READING

Reading is the third of the four language skills. It is called a "receptive" skill because when we read we receive language coming in:

1. listening (← in)
2. speaking (out →)
3. reading (← in)
4. writing (out →)

When reading skills improve, listening, speaking and writing skills improve too.

Here are some stress-free reading tests to be incorporated in our evaluation process:

❖ NOTE: ONLY LOUD READING

- Transcripts/sub-titles of some selected movies or videos.
- NEWS reading [different themes for testing expression- accident news, demise news, nation pride news etc.]
- Poetry reading
- Reading articles, letters [personal and business], memo etc.
- Advertisements, timetables or notices and brochures
- Recipes for cooking, Procedures, Guidelines, Instructions, announcements etc.

- Some interesting forward messages[jokes/information/comments/awarenesss posts]
 - Books, newspapers, short stories,
 - online blogs about topics that interest you
 - proverbs, cartoons messages, sayings,
 - Film reviews, book reviews, editorial boards notes etc.
 - Job descriptions, contracts, training materials
 - Vocabulary reading[confusing words, rhythmic words etc.]
 - Descriptive & Narrative Texts
- There should be a variety of question types, such as multiple choice, short-answer questions, identifying information, identifying writer's views, labeling diagrams, completing a summary using words taken from the text and matching information/headings/features in the text/sentence endings.

WRITING

“We Write To Taste Life Twice, In The Moment And In Retrospect”

Anais Nin, -French-Cuban Novelist

Writing is one of the important ways of expressing thoughts, and communicating ideas and views to others. Often, a person is judged by the quality of writing, he/she possesses. Also, the more you write, the more flexible your vision and thought process will be. While writing, one has to be extra cautious so that the reader can decipher the intended meaning of the content.

And the most important verity is Writing skills are important to write our ideas and experiences for future references. Be it a school, college, workplace or a society, writing has become a vital yardstick to assess one's knowledge, and intellectuality. Exams are an ideal opportunity to demonstrate this facet but to seed the love for writing, few exercises given below can really make the student to embrace writing activity.

- One minute registering words: Give a minute and ask the students to write as many as words possible.[The words can be a set of parts of speech, family words, occupational words etc.
- Feel the senses- Ask the students to imagine that they're in a situation/scenary/picture/movie/scene/beautiful destination/experience the world beyond the

universe etc.. Now ask the students to smell, feel or even taste the things they see around themselves in any of the contexts. This will really work out to be funny activity where adjectives pour in.

- Reflective writing: Ask the students to put themselves in others shoes and write the point of view of that identity. This develops express opinions.
 - Sprouting up a story: Give a starting line and ask the students to develop a story. This tells their state of mind. “ One dark night.....” . I have experienced that most of the students developed negative thinking and the story became scary, infact after the task you can tell the students to think something cheerful and vivid.
 - Comic and Witty Dialogue writing: Ask the students to construct a dialogue for any situation by adding little wit and humour on a lighter note.[teacher & student talk/ parent-teacher meet/doctor and a patient talk/interview round/grandparents and grandchildren etc.
 - Twisted endings: Let the students take few fairy tales-childhood stories,history episodes and try to give a twisted or an contrary endings on their own.
- Student writing can be evaluated on five product factors: fluency, content, conventions, syntax, and vocabulary. The teacher's feedback should be given judiciously: generous in the encouragement of ideas and improved skills, but cautious in correction. Corrective feedback should only focus on those few skill targets that have been addressed in instruction.

To sum up, as Sir Francis Bacon opines ... *Reading makes a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.*

SPEAKING

Speaking means to converse, or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language. Speaking skills are the skills that give us the ability to communicate effectively. These skills allow the speaker, to convey his message in a passionate, thoughtful, and convincing manner. Speaking skills also help to assure that one won't be misunderstood by those who are listening.

The regularly taken up activities are Group Discussions,JAM sessions, Debates, Extempores, Dialogue delivery,Brainstorming,Oral Presentations etc.

The other tasks which can be integrated are:

- Family Tree: Students should speak three sentences about their grandparents, there should be one sentence which is a false statement. The other students have to guess which is a false statement.
- Hide and Seek Description: One student has to describe a place or thing or person with the help of key words, the other student has to listen carefully and figure out the person.
- Pictorial Description: Have one student come up to the board and you show them a vocabulary word. Have the student draw the word on the board and the other students try to guess the vocabulary word.
- Fluency Games: The students are asked to stand in a circle and pass on an object with the count of the teacher, as soon as the teacher says stop, the student with the object has to say something in English fluently or speak about the student next to him. Any mistake in the sentence then the student is out.
- Peer teaching: Let the students take up peer teaching related to their concept learnt in any subject of their choice or general topic.
- May be asked about their home, family, work, studies, hobbies, interests, other general topics such as clothing, free time, computers and the internet.
- Information Transfer: Describe a graph, table, chart or diagram in their own words. discuss a point of view, argument or problem may be required to present a solution to a problem, present and justify an opinion, compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications, and evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument.
- Mock Interviews: A few students should comprise a panel of interviewers, and a set of students who should enact as candidates for the post.
- Always allow a few minutes of class time to talk about the activity, what they liked about it (or disliked), how it made them feel and what they think they've learned.

Of course, all of this involves more worthwhile speaking time!

WHAT THE TEST MEASURES:

The students at the end of the semester receives a score for each skill which is an averaged one and at last, based on all the four skills , an overall grade is given.

A student cannot be judged as a student who has passed or failed in a language nor a percentage specifying Distinction, First Class, Second Class etc. to determine is efficiency.

The following parametres can be taken into consideration for deciding their efficiency and know their achievement level. The scores and the scales means the tests provide more useful information about a learner's ability than they did before. Each score band gives the proficiency level of the English learner,

GRADE 1.Student has high command of the language: L,S,R,W skills equally.

GRADE 2.Student has command of the language with minimal imprecision.

GRADE 3.Student has command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies.

GRADE 4.Student has command of the language but gets occasionally perplexed with complex and standard language usage.

GRADE 5.Student has command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings.

GRADE 6. Student has partial command of the language and likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle day to day life functional English.

GRADE 7. Student has partial command of the language,has frequent problems in understanding and expression.

GRADE 8. Student can understands only general meaning and fails in basic communication.

GRADE 9. Student has great difficulty understanding spoken, finds difficult to read unfamiliar lexicals and fails to write simple English.

GRADE 10. Student basically has no aptitude to use the language except few words.

** Based on the individual score of each language skill the final score can be a graded on 1-10 scale.*

CONCLUSION: Thus, the assessment tools if tailor made to suit the level of an individual capacity then for sure it can help the students to have a strong sway of English language which helps them to be successful in a fast-paced, competitive academic environment.

In the end, the most important objective of teaching English is to encourage students to demonstrate what they know and develop an aesthetic insight of the language.

If we the English faculty use a wide variety of assessments, we'll be able to portray an accurate picture of our student's English abilities. In turn, we,our students and their parents will be able to see the progress, which can greatly motivate students.