

Language Assessment with General Overview of Classroom Profile and Individual Learners

Khaitova Alokxon Ilyosbek kizi

Senior teacher of English of Andijan Technical, Institute academic lyceum, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article aims at exploring the principles as well as concepts of language assessment accompanied by a specific classroom profile and it addresses language skills as well. Additionally, it provides the reader with deeper comprehension of creating assessments aligning with standards or learning objectives and addressed various needs of language learners making attempt to deliver valuable information for reporting future instructions.

Keywords: Language assessment, classroom profile, prior instruction, external language assessment, language skills, language objectives, assessment development, modification, analytic rubric, holistic rubric, fairness and equity.

Introduction: Testing students' language levels normally help educators to provide learners with expand knowledge of the target language. Hamp-Lyons (2016) claims that the purpose of the proficiency test is to measure learners' language level and to identify strengths and weaknesses of the language learner. Thus, in this part of my paper, I will give an overview for Multilevel exam test that is widely common in Uzbekistan.

To begin with, Multilevel test is a paper-based language proficiency test assessing learners' language levels according to CEFR assessment criteria. The audience include non-native speakers of English who apply for education, work or monthly salary bonus. For my target learners, this test type is specifically relevant to navigate them to enter universities with high scores after achieving proficiency certificate of this test. Multilevel test assesses learners' four language skills, reading, listening, writing and speaking. According to assessment criteria of the test, assessing scores include the following results: C1 proficient user, scores 65-75, the number of correct answers is 28-35; B2 independent user, scores 51-64, the number of correct answers is 18-27; B1 basic user, scores 38-50, the number of correct answers is 10-17 for each language skill. There is below B1 level including scores 0-37, the number of correct answers is 0-9, yet candidates, who

gained scores 0-37 in each level, are not provided with any proficiency certificate in this test. All language levels are scored separately and the results of the assessment are added up to identify overall level, which is equal to CEFR assessment criteria. Referring to the language skills sub-tests, listening continues approximately 35-40 minutes including 6 parts and 35 questions relevant to language levels from B1 to C1 at the highest point. This sub-test assesses candidate's ability to grasp main topics, detailed information, ideas, as well as to follow the flow of ideas. Reading, is one of the sub-tests of Multilevel test, consists of 5 parts and 35 questions and measures learners' ability of reading comprehension, understanding of key points of the passage and critical thinking and analyzing through reading techniques such as scanning and skimming. To accomplish the reading test, an hour is given and extra 10 minutes are given to copy the answers of both listening and reading test into the answer sheet. Writing, which is one of the productive skills, assesses candidates' grammar range and accuracy, task achievement, usage of the vocabulary and coherence as well. Mostly, writing test is regarded as the weakest point of a great number of learners as it measures not only grammar and vocabulary, but it also checks the horizon of language learners. Writing test duration is 1 hour and it requires writing a letter for Task 1 and an essay on a specific topic for Task 2. Speaking, which is a

productive skill, lasts about 12-15 minutes and consists of three parts and it assesses pronunciation, fluency, coherence, vocabulary size and grammar range and accuracy. Part 1 includes 6 personal questions related to daily life, Part 2 includes a two-minute speech on a particular topic with a minute preparation and Part 3 includes 5-6 logical questions related to various 2 or more topics.

METHODS

In the process of selecting tools and assessments, I focused on creating authentic and involving tasks which can cater to assess the language skills of my target learners and these tasks will meet my learners' needs. My specific learners Bek, Aisha, Nisa need to improve their productive skill writing and Denis suffers from lack of concentration while doing listening test and not reaching C1 level in listening skill. Hence, according to needs analysis towards my learners, I utilized both originally developed and modified versions of the assessments while creating, aligning with Weigle (2012) and Flowerdew & Miller (2012). By this, I emphasized designing the assessments to be more relevant to my learner's needs. My selection of modifying existing assessment, that is listening assessment, navigated me to make some changes for the existing assessment due to my learners' needs. Obviously, my learners are preparing for Multilevel exam which assesses language proficiency. In this test, there is listening sub-test including gap-filling tasks in two parts of it and in the existed material, there is T/F/NG task which is not crucial for the listening section of this external assessment. Therefore, I modified this material into gap-filling task as this will be beneficial for my learners to practice listening skill. Referring to developed assessment, that is, writing assessment, I developed the assessment from scratch and the assessment is similar to the real task provided in the external assessment. As writing is productive skill, students must have strong grammar and vocabulary knowledge as well as critical thinking skills. Thus, while integrating writing tasks into my class, I normally conduct mini-grammar lessons to be effective for students. Apart from that, I introduce the vocabulary and the language to use throughout writing process. Shin (2011) offers to organize "mini grammar lessons" over the writing activity to be beneficial for language learners in order not to suffer from lack of grammar knowledge for writing. Therefore, aligning with Shin's point of view, I do an endeavor to improve students' grammar knowledge as well.

Referring to the choice of rubric that I have designed, I selected holistic rubric for my listening assessment and analytic rubric for my writing assessment. Firstly, commenting about the holistic rubric for the listening

assessment I focused on performance descriptors in terms of correct answers in order to describe students' listening ability. Ayhan (2015) points out that, as holistic rubric can be used aligning with various tasks, it is beneficial to assess learners' ability in terms of receptive skills. Thus, I regard that holistic rubric is relevant to evaluate listening skill due to its easy way to deal with performance descriptors. When it comes to the analytic rubric that I have selected for the productive skill, writing, as writing is considered to be one of the most challenging productive skills illustrating weak and strong sides of the language learner, it should be assessed owing to various criterion. Ayhan (2015) considers that, analytic rubric is productive in terms of showing weaknesses and strengths of a learner with specific details. In alignment with Ayhan's perspective, I have utilized analytic rubric for writing skill to evaluate my learners' performance on writing specifically.

These assessments as well as rubrics have direct alignment with the language objectives below. The criterion and all tasks in the rubrics illustrate particular skills and ideology mentioned in the objectives. I have designed those assessments following a particular instructional order and I ensure that, these assessments prepare my students to illustrate their comprehension on listening and writing as well. They can do gap filling tasks easily through practicing the assessment and for writing they are able to edit their written products with the help of preparation for their external assessment. Referring to the writing assessment, it navigates to drafting and revising the grammar and vocabulary and receiving feedback as the result of practicing writing skills.

RESULTS

General overview of learners including age, ethnicity, level. This target classroom consists of 14 learners whose ages are about 15-16. All of them are native Uzbek speakers, their L1 is Uzbek and they are studying at the lyceum specialized in Exact Sciences, yet they all come from various districts of Uzbekistan. Being first-year students of the academic lyceum where I work, their language proficiency levels vary which indicates from pre-intermediate A2 level to upper-intermediate B2 level according to CEFR scale and compared to IELTS scoring system their levels vary from 4 to 6.5 band scores.

The course aim

The course conducted for my target learners is Preparation for Proficiency Exam Course, which aims at preparing my target learners for language proficiency exams by improving their language skills.

Prior instruction

Normally, when these learners come to the lyceum for the first time to study, some of the students' language proficiency levels indicate A2 pre-intermediate level due to the results of placement test conducted by me at the starting point of the course and those learners have had insufficient prior instruction struggling language skills and for some others this result reveals that they have had well-organized prior instruction achieving B2 level due to CEFR scale. To assist my learners in terms of achieving higher levels, I utilize scaffolding strategies for my lower level students providing them with more support in their language journey and for my higher-level students I use the differentiation instruction relevant to their levels in order to assist them to increase their levels towards advanced one. For differentiation, I require my high-level students to write a summary based on the passage in reading and listening skills and in writing and speaking, I ask them to produce more complicated product, whether it is either writing or speaking skill.

The description of individual learners

First learner: Bek

Bek is a learner from Uzbekistan, Fergana district and aged 16, whose language proficiency level is B2 upper-intermediate where he can illustrate good understanding of English with visual and auditory learning styles. His assessment score, according to the placement test including Multilevel exam samples, shows that his receptive skills, listening and reading, have been improved as the consequence of his strong attempts and hard work towards second language acquisition as well as having five-years of additional formal instruction of English to achieve high proficiency level. That was his investment to acquire the language. The result of the assessment depicts that the scores for his reading and listening skills are 63 and 64 respectively, however he considers he has areas to improve showing the result of writing and speaking skills, only 52 and 53 respectively. His extrinsic motivation leads him to be proficient user in English and he makes strong attempt to achieve the highest level. In order to support him in terms of improving his productive skills the accommodation should focus on more practice in these skills encouraging him to have more communication in English creating an English atmosphere inside the class as well as writing critical analysis on various topics.

Second learner: Nisa

Nisa is a learner who comes from Namangan and her age is 15. Her language proficiency level is A2 pre-intermediate according to conducted placement test including Multilevel exam samples and assessment score shows that she has insufficient exposure to the

English language which leads her to gain 30 and 28 from reading and listening respectively, and she is struggling with lack of experience in productive skills, writing 23 and speaking 24. Her learning style is visual and as she has had insufficient prior instruction of English consisting of only a six-month's preparation for entrance exams of the lyceum, she only achieved A2 level on CEFR scale. For the time being, she is eager to increase her language level from A2 to B1 and then to B2. Her intrinsic motivation leads her to achieve this step by step by means of hard work and has intention of visiting one of the English-speaking countries and continuing her studies there since she wants to have enough exposure to both formal and informal English. As the investment to acquire the language, she should spend extra time on practicing language skills by attending extra classes. Accommodation should address for her to provide her with simplified texts to improve her receptive skills and to enhance her productive skills, extra classes should be implemented emphasizing grammar and vocabulary as well as communicative atmosphere using only English in class.

Third learner: Aisha

Aisha is a learner from Andijan, whose age is 16 having interpersonal learning style. Her language level is B1 intermediate and according to the result of conducted placement test, assessment scores indicate she has had enough exposure to English including three-year's experience in language acquisition in private tutorial. The result of the test shows that, her spoken English is dominant among all other language skills indicating 54 as she has had enough exposure to spoken English having lived in the UK with her family members during five years due to her father's job requirement. However, she struggles with lack of experience in formal English and according to the test result, her reading and writing skills deserve 39 and 33 respectively. Still, as an influence of living in the UK her listening shows higher, that is, 45. For her, accommodation should focus on enhancing her formal English by providing her with scaffolding in terms of teaching grammar deeper as well as encouraging her to improve critical thinking skills to make her do tasks on specific topics. Her intrinsic motivation leads her to achieve high level in the English language and as an investment in her language journey, she needs more practice attending to extra classes studying grammar and vocabulary deeper.

Fourth learner: Denis

Denis is a learner who is from Andijan as well similar to Aisha. Being aged 16, due to the placement test result, Denis's language level is C1, advanced, showing proficient user according to CEFR scale. He has had

massive exposure to English to achieve this level as he has had perfect prior instruction with private tutorial including six years. As his both parents are teachers of English at the University, his extrinsic motivation impacts positively on his learning styles, which are auditory and kinesthetic. As an investment towards language learning, he has already spent six years without stopping to acquire the language spending extra time on practicing English with his parents. The results of the test illustrates that his writing and speaking scores are 68 and 66 respectively with perfect usage of strong advanced grammar and vocabulary, and the scores of his receptive skills, listening and reading are 64 and 65 respectively. Denis has self-confidence towards his productive skills and often supportive to his other peers while he struggles with reading strategies and considers this language skill to be improved. Accommodation for him should focus on encouraging him to practice reading strategies such as skimming and scanning, note-taking and highlighting key points of the passage.

DISCUSSION

Language objectives to be assessed

Language objective 1 (Writing): Students will be able to write a formal request letter using relevant structure for this letter type addressing all requirements within the task of the letter

Language objective 2 (Writing): Students will write a request letter using relevant grammar structures and a particular language including vocabulary for this letter type

Language objective 3 (Listening): Students will grasp the meaning from the context and predict correct answers due to their critical thinking skills and their prior vocabulary knowledge

Language objective 4 (Listening): Students will distinguish the tone of the speaker and voice accurately

Instructional outlines

Writing

In this assessment, students will be writing a formal request letter to get prepared for their writing exam in their external assessments. As there is a requirement for test takers to write a letter in Multilevel exam, my learners must be aware of the ways of writing a letter. Since writing is regarded as the most challenging skill and being productive one, the writing tasks should be implemented accompanied with grammar and vocabulary. Weigle (2012) offers that writing L2 teachers who are teaching writing skill should address the structure of the language and vocabulary as well to reach efficient writing product. Therefore, aligning Weigle's perspective, I try to conduct my writing classes

including mini grammar lessons. The outline of the assessment is the following and it is original one:

- Students are introduced the writing type, request letter by the teacher;
- Students are provided with the topic for the letter that is going to be written;
- Students are given the language of the letter and grammar structures to utilize throughout their writing product;
- They will be set exact amount of time to generate their writing drafts;
- They will be set exact amount of time to edit their written drafts.

Listening

In this assessment, students will be doing a listening task to be beneficial for their external assessment. In their external assessments, my target learners need to do gap filling task, which needs to be used in the exam. I have modified the assessment as it was T/F task in the existing task. Multilevel exam does not include doing T/F task in the listening exam. Therefore, I altered the task into gap-filling task. The link to access the audio will be given in the reference list. As Thompson (1995) suggests that, a vital factor for the listening task, it should cover smaller passages to be understandable for test takers. Being in favor of Thompson's suggestion, I used passages with fewer minutes for my learners. The outline of the assessment is the following and it is modified.

- Students will be provided with the handouts including listening task;
- Students will be introduced the way and techniques of fulfilling the task;
- Students are introduced new vocabulary that is going to be used in the listening;
- They are provided with the audio by the teacher;
- At the end of the lesson, all correct answers will be provided by the teacher.

Assessment development or modification with rubrics (Option 3)

Assessment 1. Writing

You got the scores from the instructor of your English language course but you realized that your productive skills were marked with lower scores. Write a letter to your instructor.

In your letter:

- Introduce yourself
- Explain why you think the scores are low

- Ask to make an appointment to discuss your weaknesses.

Write an appropriate style

Do not write your own address and begin with Dear Sir/Madam,

Write at least 150 words.

You should spend 20 minutes to do this task.

Analytic rubric for the writing assessment

	Proficient user C1	Very good user B2	Good user B1	Basic user A2
Task achievement (Objective 1)	Addresses all questions provided in the task with completely interpreted ideas, word count exceeds	Addresses all questions provided in the task with some ideas are not justified, word count meets	Addresses some questions provided in the task with only ideas that are not justified, word count is limited	Addresses an only question provided in the task with misinterpretation, word count is less
Grammar range and accuracy (Objective 2)	Uses wide range of grammar structures and only compound and complex sentences without any errors	Uses sufficient grammar structures and more compound sentences with some spelling errors	Uses some grammar structures and more simple sentences with some grammar errors	Uses basic grammar structures and only simple sentences with a lot of grammar errors
Lexical range (Objective 2)	Uses wide range of high-level vocabulary, the vocabulary is relevant to the topic and not repeated	Uses sufficient vocabulary related to the topic, some words are repeated	Uses limited vocabulary related to the topic with repetition of most words	Uses only basic vocabulary with incorrect usage, vocabulary range is limited with repetition
Coherence and cohesion (Objective 1)	Ideas and paragraphs are linked coherently with the appropriate usage of wide range of	Ideas and paragraphs are linked coherently with appropriate usage of some cohesive devices	Some ideas are linked coherently, some cohesive devices are used incorrectly	There is no cohesion linking the ideas, cohesive devices are not used

	cohesive devices			
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I have found it relevant to use analytic rubrics for writing skill assessment as it is a productive skill and should be assessed owing to various criterion. Weigle (2012) claims that, in order to assess test-taker's performance separately, analytic rubric can be utilized due to varying characteristics of the writing product. In alignment with Weigle's perspective, I have preferred to integrate analytic rubric type into my productive skill assessment.

Assessment 2. Listening

Listening Part 4

You will hear a dialogue about a party between an adolescent girl and her father. As you listen,

fill in the numbered spaces from 1 to 8 with necessary words. You will hear the conversation twice. You have to write no more than ONE WORD or A NUMBER in the spaces.

Example: Name of the girl 0. Anna

The Party

- The day of the party 1
- The age of Tom's sister 2.....
- Participants of the birthday party are 3..... and cousins as well.
- Dad expects the birthday party to be 4..... as plenty of people are coming.
- 5..... spends too much time at their home studying and it is time to enjoy relaxing from studies.
- Starting time of the party 6.....
- 7..... Dad will take the two girls to the party at eight.
- The time for picking up the girl from the party 8.....

Holistic rubric for the assessment

Score	Comprehension and inference (Objective 3, 4)	Vocabulary knowledge (Objective 3)
Exceeds the standard 8-7 correct answers	Understanding of key ideas with the usage of critical thinking, speaker's perspective from the tone of the speakers, uses supporting details	Comprehension and remembering of used new vocabulary over the listening audio, the usage of the vocabulary is accurate with distinguishing of the words from the pronunciation
Meets the standard 6-4 correct answers	Grasps main idea of the listening audio understands the passage with some hesitation, there is hesitation in identifying the tone of speech	Incorrect translation of some words in the listening, grasping some words from the pronunciation
Improvements needed 3 or fewer	Does not understand the topic which is on, there is much hesitation in distinguishing the tone of the speaker	Words are translated incorrectly and most of them are unfamiliar without

		identifying from the pronunciation
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Referring to receptive skill, listening, I have utilized holistic rubric as the result of the test taker depends of the number of correct answers. Flowerdew & Miller (2012) suggest using holistic rubric with descriptors and points for listening assessment as it is one of the receptive skills that can be marked with just either the percentages or number scales. Aligning with the viewpoints of these two authors, I have considered holistic rubric with performance descriptors is relevant to assess my modified assessment of the listening skill.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Multilevel test serves as an essential and vital external language assessment for my target learners to create academic opportunities. Being aware of the structure and requirements of the test helps me as a teacher conduct the English language classes in an appropriate way. Consequently, I can organize language classes meeting my learners' needs and this leads to prepare them for Multilevel exam and to increase their overall language proficiency level.

I will use the data from those assessments in order to inform about the instruction used in future and will identify areas where language learners need extra assistance and chances to improve. To exemplify, when students struggle with distinguishing supporting facts continually over the listening task, the lessons in future will contain more comprehensible instruction and making practice on this language skill. When it comes to the data from the writing task, it will inform the choice for writing experiences used in the future as well as providing an insight into fields where learners require additional instruction on grammar and vocabulary as well as structuring.

I must admit that, the assessments are normally formed in order providing fairness and equity for all language learners. Puspawati (2014) offers proficiency tests to have fairness in terms of being all students equal to show their language learning ability as well as addressing all learners' needs. In alignment with Puspawati's point, I have made the assessments including fairness based on my students' needs. Brown (2005) suggests focusing on providing a relevant support to meet the learners' individual needs maintaining the equity of the assessment. Aligning with Brown's ideas, I will focus on some individual needs of my students. For example, Bek, Nisa and Aisha suffer from lack of grammar knowledge and cannot improve their writing skill, so I conduct mini-grammar lessons

over each writing classes to use within their writing products. Taylor & Chen (2016) suggest using accommodations for lower level students in order to create an opportunity to demonstrate their language learning abilities. Denis whose level is almost C1 struggles his listening skill and I drive him practice listening skill more providing him with listening assessments that he needs. By this endeavors I maintain equity throughout my classes and provided assessments.

However, there is an area to improve, that is, exploring more creative and engaging methods to observe the progress of the students will be beneficial for me in terms of creating more valid and reliable assessments with relevant rubrics due to my students' needs.

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