TESTS ARE VALID AND RELIABLE MEASURES OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN ELT

ТЕСТИ Є ОБГРУНТОВАНИМИ ТА НАДІЙНИМИ ЗАСОБАМИ ВИМІРУ ДОСЯГНЕНЬ У ВИВЧЕННІ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

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Learning English as a second language is very popular these days. It is not only because of films, songs and tourism. Knowing foreign languages opens new doors for self-improvement and broadening the worldview. English is often necessary if you want to have a good job. To get a job in an international company, you need to have a good command of English. In order to achieve a good level of skills and knowledge in any area of education, you need a good teacher and an effective teaching. Teaching should be modern and productive, and teachers should be qualified. Experienced teachers use a variety of effectual, up-to-date resources and tools. This stimulates students' interest and increases their motivation to learn. One of such resources is testing. This article analyses the necessity of using tests in the process of teaching English. The article highlights a wide range of test applications that allow both teachers and students to get a clearer picture of success and achievement. The article argues that students' self-assessment of their own success is the logical consequence of the use of tests in language teaching. It asserts that, if properly designed, tests can help teachers and students understand how much progress they have made in learning and what need to be improved. The article states that tests have to meet the criteria that a teacher should know in order to develop a valid, practical and reliable test. The article points out the tight interrelation between testing, assessment and evaluation. It reveals that testing for formative assessment of students' progress and achievement is usually conducted in a way that does not cause students anxiety and is productive not only for control but for teaching too. This article notes that the test is the best way to assess the current level of competence achieved by students. It also describes the types of tests, their characteristics and tasks that are often included in them. The article reveals the cognitive operations done by the students when doing a test.

Key words: testing, teaching, evaluation, assessment, feedback, educational process.

Вивчення англійської як другої мови є дуже популярним у наш час. І справа не тільки в фільмах, піснях і туризмі. Знання іноземних мов відкриває нові двері для самовдосконалення та розширення світогляду. Англійська часто необхідна, якщо ви хочете мати хорошу роботу. Щоб отримати роботу в міжнародній компанії, потрібно вільно володіти англійською мовою. Для того, щоб досягти хорошого рівня навичок і знань у будь-якій сфері освіти і людських досягнень, потрібен хороший вчитель і ефективне викладання. Викладання має бути сучасним і ефективним, а викладачі – кваліфікованими. Досвідчені викладачі використовують різноманітні, сучасні методи та засоби. Це стимулює зацікавленість студентів та підвищує їхню мотивацію до навчання. Одним з таких методів є тестування. У статті аналізується необхідність використання тестування у процесі викладання англійської мови. Широкий спектр його застосування дозволяє як викладачам, так і студентам отримати більш чітку картину успішності та досягнень. У статті констатується, що самооцінка студентами власного успіху є логічним наслідком використання тестів у навчанні іноземної мови. Стверджується, що за умови правильної розробки тести можуть допомогти викладачам і студентам зрозуміти, наскільки вони досягли прогресу в навчанні і що потрібно вдосконалити. У статті також зазначається, що тести повинні відповідати критеріям, які повинен знати викладач, щоб розробити обґрунтований, практичний і надійний тест. Стаття вказує на тісний зв'язок між тестуванням, аналізом та оцінюванням. Вона також показує, що тестування для формувального оцінювання прогресу і досягнень учнів зазвичай проводиться таким чином, щоб не викликати в учнів тривоги і є продуктивним не тільки для контролю, але й для навчання. У статті зазначається, що тест є найкращим способом оцінити поточний рівень компетентності, досягнутий студентами. Описано типи тестів та їхні характеристики.

Ключові слова: тестування, викладання, оцінювання, зворотній зв'язок, навчальний процес.

Problem setting. One of the most important directions in the modern methodology of foreign language teaching is the development of a reliable control system necessary for the management of the educational process and its quality. Testing provides constant feedback between the teacher and the student, gives information about the results of the student's learning activity. After all, the purpose of an educational process is the transfer of knowledge and skills from the teacher to the student, and this transfer depends to a large extent on the regular work of the students and on systematic monitoring,

which makes it possible to evaluate the knowledge acquired.

Testing plays an important role in the organization of classroom and final control. It is one of the most valid and effective ways of checking students' knowledge, skills and abilities at different levels of the educational process, because it provides an assessment of a person's knowledge and competence at any time the teacher needs. Testing is designed to improve the learning process and motivate students to learn better. Moreover, testing has become one of the means of individualization in the educational process, as it makes it possible to take into account the existing psychological characteristics of students. It also helps to diagnose students' difficulties and weaknesses in the language material they have learned. It is a measure to improve the effectiveness and a way to predict the success of language teaching. It contributes to the development of different language skills and to an overall level of mastering the material.

Testing has a number of significant advantages over other types of control. It provides the opportunity to test a great amount of learned material as well as to monitor the progress of a large number of students quickly and efficiently. It only takes a short time to check a test, so the teacher can often carry out such checking activities and manage the process. Besides, the teacher can test a separate language element or a skill that needs to be tested. It can be vocabulary and grammar or a specific language activity (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating).

Developing a good test is not an easy task, but it is a very important one. It requires great care and responsibility. The tasks in the test must be appropriate and clearly defined. In order to obtain appropriate results, the test should be prepared in accordance with the purpose of the test. In other words, the tests should comply with the basic principles of language assessment: validity, reliability, ease of use and washback. **Analysis of recent research and publications.** Testing as an integral part of the educational process has always attracted special attention of scientists and researchers. They consider testing to be one of the most important elements of learning activities, a kind of indicator of students' gradual progress in language learning, showing not only their weaknesses but also their strengths.

Wilkins concludes that in order to improve a learner's communicative competence, new testing methods need to be developed and used in teaching. According to Bachman, tests are one of the types of educational tasks used to control and diagnose knowledge [1, p. 16].

S. Messick claims "it is about assessing learners' progress, providing them with feedback and deciding on the next step the teaching and learning process" [5, p. 241] Emphasising that language testing and teaching go hand in hand, Bachman and Palmer believe that virtually all language teaching programs involve some form of testing and help language teachers to gather and analyse information about their teaching practice and learners' outcomes [1, p. 8].

Rogers, Cheng and Hu investigated EFL teachers' beliefs about language testing, assessment and evaluation. They examined the practices of teachers from Canada, Hong Kong and Beijing. Curiously, the quantitative results showed great similarities between teachers from three different contexts. The study confirms the fact that testing, assessment and evaluation are important factors in improving teaching practice and developing learners' proficiency.

D. Douglas assumes that tests ask candidates to demonstrate their knowledge or skills in a concentrated way so that the result can be evaluated and conclusions drawn about the standard of performance that can be expected of the candidate, either at the time of the test or at some future time [2, p. 170].

Desmond Allison in his book 'Language Testing and Evaluation' (1999) states that learning conditions and learning outcomes are extremely important for teachers. Testing and evaluation are crucial concerns in language learning in order to assess student outcomes and to judge the achievement of learning objectives. According to Allison, awareness of testing and evaluation helps the teacher to make 'informed decisions' about the teaching methods to be used, to assess learners' progress and to identify weaknesses.

M. Kane argues that the assessment process in language learning is a continuous process involving a wide range of methodological tools and techniques, and above all, testing.

In 1961 Robert Lado first used the term 'validity' in relation to language testing. He concluded that a test should give meaningful answers and measure what it is supposed to measure. In other words, it must be valid. Validity is therefore considered to be one of the most important qualities of a language test, along with reliability. A test is considered valid if the test content and conditions are relevant and there are no irrelevant items that are more difficult than the items being tested [3, p. 11].

Setting objectives. The purpose of the article is to discuss the phenomena of testing in foreign language teaching. The article tends to emphasize the essentiality of including different types of tests in the educational process. The article aims to draw attention to a close relationship between teaching and testing and

to the importance of the latter in the final assessment. The aim of the article is to examine the importance of testing for educational and language development, its types and characteristics, aims, challenges and benefits. The article is intended to highlight the difficulties involved in developing tests.

Presenting the main material. Successful teaching is impossible without proper and fair assessment, the best tool for which is an appropriate test. Today, testing is a crucial element in language teaching. It can be used for different purposes. It is a good way of gaining access to a student's current academic progress or to a level of acquired skills or abilities. It can be a means of a teach-and-test control. Teaching and testing are closely connected. They are two interrelated processes. In order to teach well, teachers need to have up-to-date information about students' performance. Teachers need to know the actual level of knowledge and skills that students have acquired. In such circumstances, tests are the best way to do this, as they provide both teachers and students with useful information on how to improve the learning process. This makes testing an important part of a teaching process and a reliable step towards mastering the language. Tests help students to check what they have learned and to realize what they need to revise and relearn. Students have a positive attitude towards the learning process because testing reflects the progress of their academic performance. Testing gives teachers access to information about students' needs, which helps them to use the most effective teaching methods [1, p. 27].

Testing is a vital part of an assessment process. It is the fastest way to get real results for relevant and valid assessment. Both testing and assessment not only help to measure language skills, but are also a tool for correcting teaching methods and shaping learning outcomes [5, p. 256].

There is a close relationship between testing, assessment and evaluation. In a broad sense, they are different aspects of the same action. While teaching, a teacher tests, assesses and evaluates. They are essential elements of the teaching process. There are two kinds of assessment in teaching: summative and formative. Formative assessment is a very attractive tool for students because it often does not involve grades. Formative assessment is a good way to get feedback that can be used by the teacher to improve the current teaching and learning context. It is also known as educational assessment or classroom assessment; it helps to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses as well as his/her preferences. In this way, formative assessment helps the teacher to evaluate student progress, as well as to modify and improvise his/

her own teaching methods. It also gives students an opportunity to assess their own progress [2, p. 170].

The aim of summative assessment is to evaluate students' learning and compare it with some standards or benchmarks. Summative assessment stimulates students to learn intensively in order to achieve better results. It may be an examination or a test. Summative assessment refers to a more formal form of assessment and testing. It is administered periodically, usually at the end of a unit or a semester, and assists in the preparation of grades or the evaluation of the course/curriculum effectiveness, etc [3, p. 186].

From a scientific point of view, testing is a research method based on a set of rules. A test is a standardized task, the results of which can be used to assess not only the knowledge, skills and abilities of the tested person, but also his psychophysiological qualities. Testing increases motivation, develops independence and personality.

When completing a test, students perform a series of cognitive operations to establish some relationships between the components of the tasks. There are a large number of types of test tasks, but they are based on a rather limited set of mental and verbal operations. These operations include:

– selection and identification,

– comparison, i.e. finding similarities, identities, differences,

– arranging in a certain order,

– finding a missing element,

– generalization,

– correction,

– evaluation of information (as to its completeness, correctness or vice versa).

The most common tools that reflect these verbal operations are: 1. multiple choice; 2. double choice; 3. completion, including completion combined with multiple choice; 4. grouping actions; 5. comparison; 6. transformation; 7. interpretation; 8. answering questions; 9. ordering; 10. correction.

Tests and assessments provide feedback on student learning. Feedback is a crucial part of the learning process because it determines future learning. Tests and assessments not only provide feedback to the teacher, but also allow the student to self-assess his/her achievement. Thus, testing and assessment provide a better understanding of the progress or lack of progress in the teaching and learning process and the achievement of the intended learning outcome.

Language testing and assessment focuses on the acquisition of four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Unlike other subjects, language is skill-based and requires a certain level of proficiency. Thus, a language test can be

used to test a learner's level of proficiency or to test the mastery of a particular instruction or language module, such as grammar or vocabulary [3, p. 180]. If the first type of test assesses the student's ability to use the language for communication and practical purposes, the second type of test assesses the student's progress or understanding of a separate section of the curriculum.

A good test can be designed with the purpose of the course or module in mind. The teacher should define the objectives of the test and prepare and plan the test in advance. All basic language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing – are important for language learning. As time is an important factor in test preparation and administration, the duration and frequency of the test should be considered [5, p. 256].

The four essential characteristics of a good test are the following – Reliability: the test should be reliable and give similar results under the same test conditions. In other words, it should be consistent. – Validity: the test should meet the desired outcome and provide meaningful information. – Practicality or usability: the test should be practical, which means that it should be cost-effective and time-efficient to perform. – Washback is a term used in education to describe the impact (beneficial or harmful) of assessment on teaching and learning, i.e., the test should show what was most effective in the material prepared for the test and how this may have affected learning.

Tests can be objective and subjective. Objective test includes multiple choice questions, true-false, cloze test, column matching, fill-in-the-blanks, etc. Subjective test, on the other hand, tests the student's question-answer, short notes, essays, etc. Placement test, aptitude test, ability test, admission test, diagnostic test, etc. are classified as objective.

There are five traditional types of tests: diagnostic tests, placement tests, proficiency tests, progress tests and achievement tests as defined by some scholars 1. A diagnostic test is often a teacher's first step when starting a new academic year, a new group, a new material. According to the Longman Dictionary [4, p. 276–277], a diagnostic test is a test designed to show what students know and do not know before starting a particular course. 2. A placement test, again referring to the Longman Dictionary [4, p. 279–280], is a test that places students at an appropriate level in a program or course. Its name is derived from its purpose. This type of test is also used to decide which group the learner could join. A placement test is a general test and focuses purely on a wide range of topics in the language, it does not test any

specific topic. If we compare a placement test and a diagnostic test, we can see that they have much in common: both are given at the beginning of the study year and both are designed to distinguish the current level of knowledge of the students. A diagnostic test, however, shows the students' general knowledge so that the teacher can plan an appropriate syllabus for them, whereas, a placement test is designed to use the information of the students' knowledge to place them in groups according to their language level. 3. A progress test is a type of test that can be used at any stage of learning to check on the performance of students. It shows whether the students have been successful in learning the material that was recently taught. It is a check of individual elements rather than a check of all the material in a semester or an academic year. It is usually not very long and is intended to check the recent material. It provides information on whether the material has been successfully learned or whether students need to practice more instead of starting to learn new material. As a rule, such tests do not have any influence on the final grade of the students. It is a kind of formative assessment. Thus, it can be argued that the progress test is a vital and an integral part of learning. We can even say that the progress test makes it easier to learn the material in a certain way. It is the progress test that can become a motivating factor for students, as success increases students' confidence in their own knowledge and motivates them to study harder. 4. In addition to the progress test, there is one more type of test, the achievement test. According to the Longman Dictionary [4, p. 281–282], an achievement test is a test that measures the level of language skills a person has acquired during a particular course, study or program. Progress is important and is therefore the main point of the test. If we look at progress and achievement tests, they may seem similar, but they are not. They both check the acquisition of newly learned material, but they are very different in their time of application. The achievement test is used primarily to check how well students have mastered the material covered, rather than individual parts of it, as it is in a progress test. 5. As Longman Dictionary says [4, p. 281–282], a proficiency test is a test, which measures how much of a language a person knows or has learnt. It is not referred to any syllabus, program or curriculum, but aims to test students' language competence. Examples of such tests are Cambridge First Certificate, IELTS, TOEFL. They measure learners' general knowledge of English if they intend to study or work

in au English-speaking country, or in any country that wants to test English for any purpose.

Conclusion. Language testing is a recognized and widely used method of testing knowledge and skills. It can be applied for different purposes. In educational institutions, it is exploited as an assessment of a student's current level of ability or progress and their level of understanding of the course material. In a professional environment, language testing can determine whether a candidate has the language skills required for the job or studying abroad.

Tests are a basis for rewards and recognition. Tests and assessments provide feedback on students learning. Feedback is an important part of the learning process as it determines the further learning process. Testing and assessing not only gives feedback to the teacher, but also allows the learner to analyse their progress based on it. A test or a quiz is used to check someone's knowledge of something, to see what they know or have learnt. Tests measure the level of skills or knowledge gained. Thus, testing is very complex and multidimensional in nature and has different goals in each case.

Taking into account the significant number of existing types of tests and their ways of application it can be concluded that testing is the key to academic success and mastering English.

It should be recognized that to be able to design a valid and practical test, a teacher needs to have an appropriate level of professional competencies. Testing is equally important for both students and teachers. The latter need it to identify problems with the curricular and to adjust it if necessary. The purpose of testing is to provide motivation through accurate and timely feedback, as well as to maintain students' interest in improvement. Furthermore, tests should be a source of motivation for students, not a source of anxiety and uncertainty for them. Therefore, when developing a test, a teacher should approach the process professionally and carefully.

Summarising the above-mentioned, we can conclude that testing is a crucial element of teaching and learning. It is a request for information and an opportunity for teachers to learn what they did not know about their students before. Testing shows not only the weaknesses but also the strengths of the student. It is used as an indicator of the gradual progress a learner makes in learning a language. Different types of tests give us the opportunity to check progress in different areas of knowledge and define students' skills and abilities.

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