Negative Attitudes Towards Evaluation
in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract:

It is generally agreed among teachers, learners and evaluators the terms assessment test and evaluation are used synonymously in most cases . In fact , when teachers quantify learner's proficiency and mastery of language or one aspect of it, they are assigning him to a test through which they measure his abilities in order to evaluate him. As early as 1990,Bachman claimed that the similarities among these terms tend to obscure the distinctive characters of each. In foreign language education, the final objective is to enable communication in the target language. The need to measure students' use of the learners language calls for an evaluation the type of evaluation use here is called evaluation of communicative competence.

الملخّـــــص:

يهدف هذا المقال من خلال دراسة ميدانية بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة باتنة الى تسليط الضوء على نقطة تربوية هامة في تعليم اللغة الانجليزية في الطور الجامعي في النظام الجديد(LMD) وهي نضرة الطلبة الى طريقة التقويم .إذ يعتبر الطلبة ان التقويم الذي يقتصر فقط على الأمتحان الكتابي لا يبين القدرات الحقيقية للطالب حيث ان اللغة الاجنبية لها جانب شفوي واخر كتابي بينما معضم طرق التقيم تخص الجانب الكتابي فقط.و من هنا فإن الطالب يتخذموقفا سلبيا من طريقة التقويم التي يعتبرها غير عادلة.واشار البحث على غقتراح بعض النقاط التي يمكن للأستاذ من خلالها تبسيط المفهوم العام للتقيم وجعته يتماشى مع القدرات الحقيقية للطالب.

Statement of the problem

Many investigations conducted on Teaching English in Algerian foreign language departments show statistically that the more learners progress on the language program the less they are fairly evaluated on the oral performances. This is confirmed by the reality that the syllabus designed for learning English at the university level focuses on the written aspect of both receptive and productive skills, and hence tends to assess learners written production on behalf the oral one. Even in the newly introduced L.M.D program, there is more tendencies to favor the written aspect of English. In addition to that, students' success and/or failure is determined mainly by their performances on the written aspect of the foreign language.

There is no doubt then to assert that students' perceptions of evaluation stems from the fact that part of their competences is not assessed; and that neglecting their potentialities on that aspect of the language leads to their failure and therefore causes their negative attitudes towards the concept of evaluation. This is rather true, a case study investigation shows that most of the students in The department of English at batna University negatively perceive being evaluated. On one hand, learners in this department receive less courses on the spoken and aural aspects of the language, which means that they have few chances to tested on their oral capacities , and on the other hand these students will have to suffer from this issue even after leaving the department. Their linguistic incompetence will be seen in their future careers whether as language teachers or language users in general.

Research objectives

The overall aim of this study is to make foreign language evaluators at the University level aware of the fact that students oral communicative performance was neglected in the old version of B.A. and continues to be also neglected in the new version called L.M.D. The objective is suggest a course distribution which meets the requirements of fair assessment and valid evaluation , which in turn lessens students negative attitudes and raises their willingness acquire.

Theoretical framework

Basic concepts:

Test, measurements.

According to Kizlik(2012),measurement refers to the process by which the attributes or dimensions of some physical object are determined. Among teachers and other evaluators, expressions like:

"this test measures vocabulary growth" are commonly used. Measuring such things as attitudes or preferences also applies. However, when we measure, we generally use some standard instrument to determine how something actually is. Standard instruments refer to instruments such as rulers, scales, thermometers, pressure gauges, etc. We measure to obtain information some needed about how something is going. Such information may or may not be useful, depending on the accuracy of the instruments we use, and our skill at using them. We measure how big a classroom is in terms of square feet, we measure the temperature of the room by using a thermometer, and we use Ohm meters to determine the voltage, amperage, and resistance in a circuit. In all of these examples, we are not assessing anything; we are simply collecting information relative to some established rule or standard. Assessment is therefore quite different from measurement, and has uses that suggest very different purposes.

What to test ?

Assessment is defined as data-gathering strategies, analyses, and reporting processes that provide information that can be used to determine whether or not intended outcomes are being achieved. Evaluation uses assessment information to support decisions on maintaining, changing, or discarding instructional or programmatic practices. These strategies can inform:

- The nature and extent of learning,
- Facilitate curricular decision making,
- Correspondence between learning and the aims and objectives of teaching, and
- The relationship between learning and the environments in which learning takes place.

Why testing ?

Assessment of student learning can be used for several purposes. Student learning studies can be used to communicate learning achievement for specified outcomes, for example, to provide learning evaluation to the student and the teacher, to motivate the student, and

to reinforce classroom strategies that work well and target those warranting   furtherinvestigation.(Satterly1989)

In addition to monitoring student learning, assessment can be used to examine program efficacy. Such assessment can indicate the degree of success of a program after its completion or can be ongoing during a program to foster continuous improvement. Programmatic assessment can be used to manage projects and communicate project outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of institutional programs, and determine direction of future processes to improve the program over time.(Wagne, 1998)

Quantity/Quality?

Quantitative studies yield numerical data that give a topical view of program impact. Data collection may involve pretests and posttests on course material, surveys, observations, or analysis of institutional data such as grades, enrollment trends, retention, and graduation rates. Quantitative data provide useful summaries of what is happening in a program and can disclose patterns, anomalies, and relationships. However, quantitative data do not necessarily indicate why. Qualitative studies accommodate individual subjectivity and detail and thus delve deeper into the social context behind student performance, attitudes, and behaviors. The study of social change frequently involves qualitative research because of its focus on the social context and patterns. Qualitative research aims to define meanings and actions in particular contexts, to show how meanings and actions are organized, and to interpret patterns in light of broader social contexts and similar settings. For qualitative studies, researchers observe or interact and talk with participants about their perceptions through individual interviews, focus groups, and document collection.(Satterly1989)

There is a common belief in foreign language education that evaluation is an educational strategy by the means of which teachers get feedback on how well learners have assumed the material taught and what decision s should be made on further instructions(Delorme 1992). Different tools and means of evaluation are set for teachers and the best theories were formulated. It remain now on the part of the

teacher to decide on which tool to use for which type of purpose. According to Bachman1990, measurement is "*the process of quantifying the characteristics of persons according to explicit procedures and rules*"(p.18)What characterizes measurement according to this author is that it requires attaching numbers or scores to individual performances. This means that measurements are quantitative descriptions of learners abilities, not evaluations in themselves. Norris et al 1998 hold similar opinion and add that language tests are simply instruments for gathering particular kinds of information on students linguistic abilities. What makes difference in practice between these terms was already mentioned by Seifert(1991)Who states that :" *Measurements like these do not evaluate students…teachers or other evaluators do that by interpreting the significance of the measurement.(p472).* This is what suggests that measurements are tools used to fit the broad purpose of evolutionist. It follows here that measurements occur only when scores are attached to performances, and evaluations do not occur until measurements are analyzed.

This means that evaluating does not mean only scoring a test, although testing is the fundamental procedure in evaluation. Rather, evaluation means according to Wallace :" *putting a value or estimation of worth upon someone or something*"(p).121). This is to say that we may evaluate someone as a *good person* or something as interesting but most importantly teacher evaluate a learner and say he/she is successful and passes to the next year.

There are examples of evaluations which do not necessarily use tests or measures. This may be the use of informal observation of a student's performance in speech improvement through classroom discussions and participation. A non-test measure used in evaluation can be the teacher's ranking of learners progress in mastering punctuation system through collected written topics. A good example of a test used for evaluation is an achievement test which indicates students progress after a given period of instruction. There are still cases of non-evaluative tests used for measurements. Most common among these are research works assigned to students for the purpose of developing reading skills and note-taking abilities. Measurements which are not evaluative are examples of tasks to which the teacher assigns code numbers which serve as standards for quantifying students performances as a motivating factor for acquisition. In Short, all test are measures, but not all measures use tests. Not all tests or

measures are evaluations ,and not all evaluations evolve either measurements or tests.

Assessment and evaluation

Assessment and evaluation are integral components of the teaching learning process where the central objective is to improve both learning and teaching. There is an undeniable link between these two terms is perceived in the sense that well planned assessment and fairly conducted evaluations lead to successful learning. Spandel and Stiggins have expressed this in the following words: *"in effective learning environment,assessment and instruction are inexorably linked"(p.4).* The argument here is that assessment data assists the teacher in planning and adapting for further instruction. In this sense, teachers can enhance student' understandings of their own progress by involving them in gathering their own data. Such participation makes it possible for students to identify personal leraning goals. Teachers generally gather data about students from the scores these latter have obtained in test. What is worth stating here is that scoring is considered as an evaluation not only by students but by teachers as well.

Assessment is a broad term that includes testing. A test is a special form of assessment. Tests are assessments made under contrived circumstances especially so that they may be administered. In other words, all tests are assessments, but not all assessments are tests. We test at the end of a lesson or unit (Richard 1998). We assess progress at the end of a school year through testing.Whether implicit or explicit, assessment is most usefully connected to some goal or objective for which the assessment is designed. A test or assessment yields information relative to an objective or goal. In that sense, we test or assess to determine whether or not an objective or goal has been obtained. Assessment of skill attainment is rather straightforward. Assessment of understanding is much more difficult and complex. Skills can be practiced; understandings cannot(Kizlik 2012). We can assess a person's knowledge in a variety of ways, but there is always a leap, an inference that we make about what a person does in relation to what it signifies about what he knows.

Assessment uses educational test which were defined by Caroll as:"… *a procedure designed to elicit certain behavior from which one can make inferences about certain characterists of an individual*"(1968.p.20). This suggest that tests can be used to obtain precise characteristics of a behavior of an individual in one sample

area of language. A test then has an explicit nature in that it shows accurately how an individual learner or group of learners behave in a certain atmosphere. Of course, measurements which do not evolve tests do not accurately indicate students capacities in all language aspects as do tests. However, this does not mean that measures are less reliable than tests in highlighting samples of learners' abilities. For example, a teacher's ranking of a student's collected letters during classroom activities do not accurately indicate how well this learner will be successful to manifest hi potential abilities to write for a newspaper or magazine. Further, Bachman comments that:

"this does not mean that others measures are less reliable that tests, but to make the point that the value of tests lies in their capability for eliciting the specific kinds of behavior that test users can interpret as evidence of the attribute or abilities which are of interest"(p.22).

According to this quotation, one can assume the role of tests and measures in the process of assessing students' performances .They provide valuable information on how well an individual learner or group of learners are doing in developing certain linguistic competences. However, the difference in terms of value , between them tends to favor tests for their accuracy; in that tests items are standards against which students performances are tested.

When we evaluate, what we are doing is engaging in some process that is designed to provide information that will help us make a judgment about a given person or a given situation. Generally, any evaluation process requires information that takes into account such ideas as objectives, goals, standards, procedures, and so on. When we evaluate, we are saying that the process will yield information regarding the worthiness, appropriateness, goodness, validity, legality, etc., of something for which a reliable measurement or assessment has been made. Teachers, in particular, are constantly evaluating students, and such evaluations are usually done in the context of comparisons between what was intended (learning, progress, behavior) and what was obtained.

What is worth mentioning here is that it is important not to confuse evaluation with assessment. When learners are assessed through tests or other kinds of measures they are not yet evaluated .Indeed, the act of evaluating a learner is not simply gathering information relevant to instruction ;it is analyzing those data against standards in order to

enable teachers or other evaluators hold judgments and make decisions.

Field work and investigation

The present work shows the results of an investigation conducted in the English department   at Batna University . Starting from the initially stated problem we had the intention to answer some questions related the hypothesis that students fear of evaluation results form the fact the evaluation itself is not highly objective. While official texts and directives assert that the overall aim of English teaching in The department is to enable communication in the target language,students receive excessive load   only in one aspect of the language. The paradox is that these same learners will be asked to use the oral aspect of the language more than the written one even in their future careers after the university. This fact make students feel a total subordination of the results they obtain in the written test and examinations which strengthens their belief that the success depends entirely on their teachers assessment in the written language.

Our study helped us to gain some clear insights also on how testing and evaluation are conducted in real practice and to what extent the gap is still large between what the theory suggests and what goes on in the field. The following table shows the imbalance between not only oral /written aspects evaluation but also instruction

Skill Course(L.M.D)	Oral performance	Written performance	Oral evaluation	Written evaluation
1st	20%	80%	10%	90%
2nd	25%	75%	15%	85%

Numbers in this table show that students anxiety and negative attitudes towards evaluation can be justified by the excessive focus on one kind of performance evaluation; that of the written aspect while they are supposed to be trained equally enough in both oral and written competences.

Our interpretation of the responses of the sample population of130 students on whom this study was conducted allowed us to make the following remarks:

-testing and evaluation are still an area containing conflicting concepts and understandings. There is still little consensus between teachers and students as to the nature and use of evaluation.

-Although very rare cases showing congruence between theory and practice are witnessed, the gap is still too wide to contain in such an attempt as this work.

-It is not the exam itself which frightens students , but the way the exam is approached an analyzed by the teacher. Students till believe that the they way they evaluated does not fairly show their true competences.

-testing and evaluation theories are rarely pit into practice in the department of English; and when they so, they still lack pedagogical implementations.

-learners complain about exams and evaluations in general because of the overemphasis on written test. There are even cases where courses of phonetics are examined though written tests.

Students prefer being evaluated through oral ways though they do not receive enough oral training. Their teachers do understand well this situation but remain unable to do much.Discusions on evaluation between teachers and students is a rare phenomenon. The absence of a dialogue between these two partners contributes to collapse the enterprise. It is only the test results which decides about the students failure or success. This is what renders the situation worse for the students who continue believing that their negative attitudes towards evaluation are justified.

This is true. Generally students develop different attitudes towards the mark, and apprehend the nature of the task assigned to them in different manners. They often show anxiety as to whether the task they have to perform is to be graded, and thus, constitutes part of their evaluation; or rather it is simply another way to keep them busy. Perceiving things this way means that students make more efforts if their performances in a given task will be scored. They will certainly do the same task with more ease and less anxiety when the work assigned to them is not an evaluation or part of it. To them ,what matters more is the final mark which confirms success or failure.

On the other hand, teacher confirm that generally students do not show considerable interest in learning parts of the curriculum which will not be concerned by the exam questions. The absence of learning incentives is used by the teachers to compensate for the lack of correct students understanding of the concept of evaluation. Moreover, what students are expected to receive in the oral aspect of the language is not what teacher actually provide. To assert that learners face minor

difficulties in learning indicates in our view the little attention given to this issue.

-The following table show the learners preferences of the ways of evaluation.

	Oral evaluation	Written evaluation	Combined evaluation
1st year	46	32	28
2nd year	58	23	33

The more learners progress in the language program the more they prefer being evaluated through the oral aspect of the language. This is understood especially now that technology provides a world-wide access to easy communications .Internet and all the social networks facilitate learners' exposure to English being the world's language of communication and facilitates their oral performances. This is what encourages them to express their abilities in oral English rather than in the written one. These students wish to be given more chances for being evaluated orally in the learning context.

-**What type of evaluation for what type of language Proficiency?**

On the light of our field investigation the results enabled us to confirm the hypothesis that thatching and evaluation oral performances in the department of English is far from being accurately conducted. The majority of the students here develop a negative attitude and a feeling of failure when expressed to an exam, and think they are at the mercy of their teacher who are the only ones who decide about their success or failure. Teachers and learners agree that most conflicts between them originate from the lack of a common understanding and use of evaluation. Among teachers, the same apprehension of the situation is shown. The majority of teachers acknowledge that evaluation and assessment was not part of their training as language teachers..

Students feel they are not trained enough to successfully carry out their careers as language teachers. Teachers, too, confirm this and add that the question as whether or not learners are well prepared for this task remains still not answered. It is on the oral aspect of the language that students need more training and it through the oral assessment that students prefer to be evaluated.

Oral proficiency assessment allows test takers to show how well they can communicate orally in a language. There are a number of approaches to oral proficiency assessment, including direct and semi-

direct means. Direct approaches include assessments conducted by a live interviewer who elicits language from the test taker via a face-to-face or other oral proficiency interview. Semi-direct approaches refer to testing methods that rely on something other than a live interviewer—such as a tape recorder, computer program, test booklet, or some combination of these—to elicit language from the test taker. It is important to select an approach that is appropriate for each testing situation.

Most approaches to oral proficiency assessment require a trained rater to listen to and rate the examinee's performance. For direct assessments, the interviewer usually also serves as the rater; for semi-direct assessments, the performance is rated at a later time by a trained rater. Providing reliable training for interviewers and raters comprises a great deal of the cost of oral proficiency testing. Malone(2010)

Teachers test and evaluate their learners using the same tools: planned exams. These tests do not undergo basic and necessary devised and advised by language test specialists. This is what made us suggest some practical points which aim at solving at least part of the problem:

-Students should be engaged in communicative exchanges as much as possible to enable them acquire basic oral fluency.

-Test the students performances through oral ways even in the courses which emphasize the writing skills.

-Frequent debates and discussions among teachers and even between teachers and learners on the issue of evaluation could contribute to give rise to unified evaluation policy and procedures based on a mutual compromise.

-A reappraisal of the oral aspect of the language will certainly constitute a fair assessment. A large number of students in the English department are future teacher of the language and their task will require more oral fluency than advanced oral skills.

-A specification of what ability the student has to provide is needed before the test is constructed. Students own interpretations of their mis-achievement as being due to the test difficulties should not always be taken for granted.

-A reconsideration of the way tests are held in the department of English is needed. tests and evaluation be part of the training program.

-Students'misachievements in exams should not be explained in terms of insufficient learning alone. Incomplete teaching also may be at the origin of students failure.

Conclusion

Teaching English at the university level aims at preparing students for a future used of the learned language in diverse fields. This means that language learning should be balanced in terms of oral/written competences that the student has to acquire. However, a learner at the English department is exposed four times less to the oral English than to the written one. Hence, he is evaluated excessively on his written capacities than on his oral competences. This is the major source of most student' negative attitudes and avoidance to evaluation though it is a necessary process in learning. Assessment data can be collected by both the teacher and the learner in a variety of ways. But it remains that it is only the teachers who decides about the use and interpretation of those data.

There was evidence from the field work that students' anxiety shown towards exams and evaluation stems from the way teachers use that means of *power.*In the view of learners, an evaluation which takes into account the number scores gained through tests is far from being an objective measure to hold judgment and make decision about the students' whole language proficiency. They wish to see their teachers include other ways of data collection in the process of evaluation. They add that their personal efforts made out of the class is not valuated.

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