METHODS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ESP

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Abstract: *The present article emphasizes the importance of a correct and efficient assessment within ESP courses, importance deriving from the continuous need of a feed-back, meant to improve both students' and teachers' activity. The integration of informal assessment into the ESP classes increases learners' motivation in perfecting language skills throughout the academic year, and it allows teachers to have unbiased evaluation of each learner's progress.*
Keywords: *assessment, feed-back, students, teachers, motivation*

ESP students are usually students who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills to perform particular job-related functions. An ESP course is therefore built on an assessment of purposes and needs and functions for which English is required. ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from accountancy or computer science to tourism and business management. The ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world; instead it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. Vocabulary plays an important part for the purposes of an ESP course, being considered as central. ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation.

The students' abilities in their subject-matter fields, in turn, improve their ability to acquire English. Subject-matter knowledge gives them the context they need to understand the English of the classroom. In the ESP class, students are shown how the subject-matter content is expressed in English. The teacher can make the most of the students' knowledge of the subject matter, thus helping them learn English faster.

The term "specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose for learning English. Students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This means that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies. The ESP approach enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts.

ESP assesses needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content for the teaching of relevant skills.

The teacher is a resource that helps students identify their language learning problems and find solutions to them, find out the skills they need to focus on, and take responsibility for making choices which determine what and how to learn. Teachers will serve as a source of information to the students about how they are progressing in their language learning. The assessment of students is a

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serious and often hard enterprise. Assessment is about getting to know our students and the quality of their learning. When facing with developing an assessment teachers must be quite clear about its purpose. There have been identified several purposes of assessment which may be paraphrased as follows: judging mastery of essential skills and knowledge; measuring improvement over time; diagnosing student difficulties; evaluating teaching methods; evaluating the effectiveness of the course; motivating students to study. It must never be forgotten how powerfully an assessment affects students, particularly if it is one on which their future may depend. This influence may be positive or negative and even harmful. For many students, passing the examination at the end of the course is their primary motivation. Thus, the assessment on which decisions about the student's future are to be made (summative assessment) should be kept separate from assessments which are for the benefit of the students in terms of guiding their further study (formative assessment). In dealing with summative assessment, every effort must be made to ensure that all assessments are fair and based on appropriate criteria. Students should be fully informed of these criteria, on the assessments methods to be employed and on the weightings to be given to each component. Such information should be given to students when a course begins. Formative assessment can be organized more informally. Such assessments must be free of threat, as the aim is to get the students reveal their strengths and weaknesses rather than to disguise them. Opportunities to obtain feedback on knowledge or performance are always appreciated by students and can lead to positive feelings about the department and the staff concerned. Some authors consider that evaluation is a summative process while assessment is a formative one. They make thus a difference between the term evaluation and the term assessment. The purpose of formative assessments is to provide feedback to students as they progress toward a goal. If this feedback is of a high quality, improvement in student performance can result. Summative processes have more of a gate-keeping function. For example, student applications to college are evaluated using a summative process and students are either accepted or rejected via this process. In the classroom, teachers use formative assessment on a daily basis, and then use the more summative "evaluation" to recommend report card marks at the end of a grading period. Unfortunately, the final evaluation, the "grade," can only be as good as the assessment information which was collected. As in the computer aphorism, "Garbage in = garbage out." If a teacher is producing poor assessment snapshots, the grade given will be of little use in determining what the students know or are able to do. Evaluation can be applied to the assessment process, itself, to determine if the assessments we have made are relevant, reliable, and valid. If they are relevant, then the assessments are tied to our classroom instruction. If would be highly irrelevant to assess skills we have not attempted to teach nor included in our curriculum. That does not mean, however, that all assessments made by all teachers are always relevant.

Traditional assessment is any type of assessment in which students choose a response from a given list. Such assessments include the standard true/false quiz or multiple-choice test so familiar to students. However, matching exercises also fall under this category, as do fill-in-the-blank activities, if students are given a "word bank" from which to choose answers. In traditional assessments, then, students are expected to recognize that one particular choice best answers the question asked. In contrast to traditional assessment, alternative assessment or informal includes any assessment in which students create a response to a question. Here, again, we find some stock classroom activities, as short-answer and essay questions. In both of these exercises, students are called upon to respond to a question using their own ideas, in their own words. Of course, these are not the only activities which require student creativity in the classroom.

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In planning assessment, it is necessary to be aware of the variety of methods available. As our article concerns assessment of ESP vocabulary as a main task we will further state some methods for assessment trying to identify the most suitable for the assessment of the ESP vocabulary. The most common types of assessment are: essay, short-answer, objective(multiple-choice, true-false), direct observation, oral, structured practical assessment.

The essay is the only means we have to assess students' ability to compose an answer and present it in effective prose. It can also indirectly measure attitudes, values and opinions. The level of the acquired vocabulary can also be measured with the help of essays. Of particular importance in higher education seems to be the assumption that the production of written language and the expression of thought are activities of considerable worth and that essays encourage students to develop more desirable study habits. Though they are relatively easy to set, essays are time-consuming to mark and not very appropriate for the communicative needs of ESP courses.

Short-answer tests have been surprisingly little used in recent years. But obviously more short-answer questions than essays can be fitted into a fixed time period. If one of the purposes of the assessment is to cover a wide content area, then short-answer questions have distinct advantages. Much the same may be said about multiple-choice questions but short-answer questions have the advantage of avoiding cueing and requiring students to supply an answer, rather than to select or to guess from a fixed number of options. The major limitation of the short-answer test is that it is not suitable for testing complex learning outcomes.

Another method is represented by objective tests. This generic term is used in education to include a variety of test formats in which the marking of the answers is objective. Some classifications include short-answer questions in this category. The term multiple-choice test is sometimes used synonymously with the term objective test. The characteristics of such test are the high reliability of the scoring, the rapidity of scoring and economy of staff time in this task, and the ability to test large content areas. They lend themselves to the development of banks of questions, thus further reducing the time of examination preparation in the long-term. These advantages have sometimes led to an over-reliance on objective tests and the failure to be critical in their use. The main advantage of the objective type tests is the rapidity with which scoring can be done.

Direct observation of the student performing a technical or an impersonal skill in the real, simulated or examination setting would appear to be the most valid way of assessing such skills. Unfortunately, the reliability of these observations is likely to be seriously low. This is particularly so in the complex interpersonal area where no alternative form of assessment is available. Nevertheless, in professional courses it is essential to continue to make the assessment of the student's performance, if only to indicate to the student your commitment to these vital skills. In doing so, you would be well advised to use the information predominantly for feedback rather than for important decision-making. Various ways have been suggested by which these limitations might be minimized. One is to improve the method of scoring and another is to improve the performance of the observer. The former involves the design of checklists and rating forms. Checklists are basically a two-point rating scale. Evidence suggests that the reliability of a checklist decreases when there are more than four points on the scale. The assessor has to decide whether each component on the list is present/absent; adequate/inadequate; satisfactory/unsatisfactory. Only if each component is very clearly defined and readily observable can a checklist be reliable. Rating forms come in many styles. The essential feature is that the observer is required to make judgement along a scale which may be continuous or intermittent. They are widely used to assess behaviour or performance. An example of

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rating form could contain such elements in a scale to be assesses: little or no information obtained; some information obtained, major errors or omissions; adequate performance, most information elicited; very through exploration of problems.

Oral assessment, structured practical assessment or self-assessment are few other methods that could very well apply for the evaluation of ESP students.

Practical or performance-based assessments include interviews, oral reports, role plays, describing, explaining, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing stories or text material, and so on. Oral assessments should be conducted on an ongoing basis to monitor comprehension and thinking skills.

Many teachers have success using K-W-L charts (what I know/what I want to know/what I've learned) to begin and end a unit of study, particularly in social studies and science. Before the unit, this strategy enables teachers to gain an awareness of students' background knowledge and interests. Afterward, it helps teachers assess the content material learned. K-W-L charts can be developed as a class activity or on an individual basis. For students with limited English proficiency, the chart can be completed in the first language or with illustrations.

Testing, or assessment, has always been considered as the usual means of measuring learners' achievements in a foreign language. New requirements to proficiency in ESP suggest developing various ways of evaluating learners' performance. Both traditional and new methods should be used in order to achieve the best results.

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