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Foreign Language Teachers' Attitude toward Authentic Assessment in Language Teaching

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Abstract

Problem Statement: A rapidly increasing interest has been observed in finding alternatives to traditional forms of assessment in education. For at least three decades, teachers, curriculum developers and program administrators have been studying hard to identify appropriate procedures to assess the knowledge and abilities of students. The term “authentic assessment” has emerged from this need in the field of education, and can be described as “the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities” (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 4). Given that the topic is a relatively new and challenging one, it has been observed that to examine language teachers’ perceptions and attitude toward authentic assessment is quite important.

Purpose of Study: In this study, a questionnaire which aims to determine the ideas and opinions of English language instructors regarding the use of authentic assessment has been applied and the results of the study have been presented and discussed.

Method: In order to find answers to the research question “What are the language teaching instructors’ ideas and attitude toward authentic assessment in language teaching classes?”, a questionnaire which is called “Authentic Assessment Inventory for Goal Setting”(O’Malley

and Valdez; 1992) has been used in this study. This inventory has been applied to 37 randomly-selected instructors from Atılım University Preparatory School of English. The inventory consists of 15 questions that can be answered with three alternatives, mainly, 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = a great deal.

Findings: Answers to the questions in the inventory were handled under two main categories: at what point the instructors are now, and where they wish to be concerning the issue of authentic assessment.

Conclusion and Recommendations: As a concluding remark for the study, it will be pedagogically useful to attach more importance to authentic assessment in curriculum and educational programs of language teaching. Additionally, it is recommended that more scientific research be conducted about authentic assessment, in particular on goal-setting, educational planning and program development.

Keywords: authentic assessment, traditional assessment, language teaching, testing and assessment.

Introduction

In an age where learning how to make knowledge meaningful is just as important as having the skill to remember some truths, there appears to exist an obvious need for evaluation methods different than standard traditional testing and assessment methods used until the present time. It is without doubt that, until recently, testing and assessment processes have been based on standard tests called “pen and paper tests”, and such form of tests still cover a significant portion of measurement in education both in Turkey and around the world. Nowadays, there seems to be a growing interest in testing and assessment methods.

For at least three decades, teachers, curriculum developers and program administrators have been studying hard to identify appropriate procedures to assess the knowledge and abilities of students. The term “authentic assessment” has emerged from this need in the field of education, and can be described as “the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities” (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 4).

However, “the concept of authenticity has generated quite a ripple in ESL/EFL classrooms. Contrasting perspectives have emerged over the years in reaction to this concept” (Joy, 2011, p.7). Thus, the topic has been considered as a new and challenging one and to examine language teachers’ perceptions and attitude toward authentic assessment gained importance.

Throughout this study, first some clarifying definitions of authentic assessment from the related reviewed literature will be presented and authentic assessment and standard traditional testing will be compared. Then, findings and results of the application of a questionnaire which is called “Authentic Assessment Inventory for Goal Setting”(O’Malley and Valdez; 1992) will be presented. Thus, it is aimed to determine the attitudes and opinions of the language teachers regarding the use of authentic assessment.

Literature Review

The need for alternatives to the standardized tests gave way to the term “alternative” assessment and many others such as performance assessment, dynamic assessment, portfolio assessment, instructional assessment, and authentic assessment. Although all of these terms suggest different emphases, they all share the same objective – that is, integrating learning, teaching, and assessment. Authentic assessment refers to the procedures for evaluating learner achievement or performance using activities and tasks that represent classroom goals, curricula and instructions, and in real-life situations. It emphasizes the communicative meaningfulness of evaluation and the commitment to measure that which is valued in education. It uses the diverse forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities. Authentic assessment corresponds to, and mirrors, good classroom practices; its results can be utilized to improve instruction based on the knowledge gained regarding how learners make progress. Authentic assessment also emphasizes the importance of the teacher’s professional judgment and commitment to enhance student learning. The use of self-assessment promotes the learner’s direct involvement in learning and the integration of cognitive abilities with affective learning (Hart, 1994; Kohonen, 1997; O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996).

Many other researchers have also defined the term authentic assessment. For instance, Jon Mueller (2003) defined authentic assessment as “a form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills”. According to Wiggins (1990) authentic assessment is “...engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field”. Having said so, the importance of such assessment of real-life-situation-based performance becomes more crucial in identifying students’ language abilities.

Authentic assessment has some other common names, some of which are performance assessment, alternative assessment, direct assessment. Richard Sittings (1992) has also defined this form of assessment under the name of performance assessment in this way: “performance assessments call upon the examinee to demonstrate specific skills and competencies, that is, to apply the skills and knowledge they have mastered”.

As it can be understood from the previous definitions, authentic assessment includes communicative performance assessment, language portfolios, and various forms of self-assessment by learners. According to O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996, p. 12) basic types of authentic assessment in language learning are:

- oral interviews (of learners by the teacher)
- story or text retelling (with listening or reading inputs)
- writing samples (with a variety of topics and registers)
- projects and exhibitions (presentation of a collaborative effort)
- experiments and demonstrations (with oral or a written reports)
- constructed response items (to open ended questions)
- teacher observation (of learners’ work in class, making notes)
- portfolios (focused collection of learners’ work to show progress)

It is believed that the term “authentic” in terms of assessment can only be understood better by making of detailed comparisons. According to Wiggins (1993, p. 78) “evaluation becomes authentic when we directly examine the noteworthy rational

performances of students. On the contrary, traditional assessment is based on indirect or average articles and simple placements and through these methods it is thought that valid assessment is made about the students' success and performance". In other words, authentic assessment requires that students demonstrate effective performance with their gained knowledge.

Differences Between Traditional Standardised Tests and Authentic Assessment

The developments in evaluation can be highlighted by comparing authentic assessment with traditional standardised testing. Standardised tests are usually based on multiple choice items, fill-in items and short, restricted-response tasks. They are administered to large numbers of testees with consistent scoring results and thus a high degree of reliability. The need for alternatives to the standardised tests has recently suggested the concept of "alternative" assessment. Other terms of the new approaches include such labels as performance assessment, dynamic assessment, portfolio assessment, instructional assessment, responsive evaluation and authentic assessment. While the terms suggest different emphases, they all imply an approach that aims at integrating learning, teaching and evaluation. Authentic assessment is among the most useful, emphasising real-life communicative meaningfulness of evaluation.

Standardised testing can be contrasted to authentic assessment as follows

<i>Standardised testing</i>	<i>Authentic Assessment</i>
1. Testing and instruction are regarded as separate activities	Assessment is an integral part of instruction
2. Students are treated in a uniform way	Each learner is treated as a unique person
3. Decisions are based on single sets of data (test scores)	Provides multiple sources of data, a more informative view
4. Emphasis on weaknesses/ failures: what students cannot do	Emphasis on strengths/ progress: what learners can do
5. One-shot exams	Ongoing assessment
6. Cultural/ socio-economic status bias	More culture-fair
7. Focus on one, "right answer"	Possibility of several perspectives

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| 8. Judgement without suggestions for improvement | Useful information for improving/ guiding learning |
| 9. Pressures teachers to narrow teaching to what is tested | Allows teachers to develop meaningful curricula |
| 10. Focus on lower-order knowledge and skills | Emphasis on higher-order learning outcomes and thinking skills |
| 11. Forbids students to interact; promotes comparisons between students (norm-referencing) | Encourages collaborative learning; compares learners to their own past performances and the aims |
| 12. Extrinsic learning for a grade | Intrinsic learning for its own sake |

Comparison of standardised testing and authentic assessment. (adapted from Armstrong 1994, 117-118):

Another way that Authentic Assessment is commonly distinguished from Traditional Assessment is in terms of its defining attributes.

Traditional	-----	Authentic
Selecting a Response	-----	Performing a Task
Contrived	-----	Real-life
Recall/Recognition	-----	Construction/Application
Teacher-structured	-----	Student-structured
Indirect Evidence	-----	Direct Evidence

However, a teacher does not have to choose between Authentic Assessment and Traditional Assessment. It is likely that some mix of the two will best meet the teachers' or students' needs. To use a simple example, if someone had to choose a driver from between someone who passed the *driving* portion of the driver's license test but failed the *written* portion or someone who failed the driving portion and passed the written portion, he would choose the driver who most directly demonstrated the ability to drive, that is, the one who passed the driving portion of the test. However, everyone would *prefer* a driver who passed both portions.

Reasons to Use Authentic Assessment

As it has been mentioned before, teachers often use a mix of traditional and authentic assessments to serve different purposes. Therefore, it is necessary to explain why teachers might choose authentic assessments for certain types of judgments and why authentic assessments have become more popular in recent years.

Authentic assessments are direct measures. We do not just want students to *know* the content of the disciplines when they graduate. We, of course, want them to be able to *use* the acquired knowledge and skills in the real world. So, our assessments have to also tell us if students can apply what they have learned in authentic situations.

Authentic assessments capture constructive nature of learning. A considerable body of research on learning has found that we cannot simply be fed knowledge. We need to construct our own meaning of the world, using information we have gathered and were taught and our own experiences with the world. Thus, assessments cannot just ask students to repeat back information they have received. Students must also be asked to demonstrate that they have accurately constructed meaning about what they have been taught.

Authentic assessments integrate teaching, learning and assessment. Authentic assessment, in contrast to more traditional assessment, encourages the integration of teaching, learning and assessing. In the "traditional assessment" model, teaching and learning are often separated from assessment, i.e., a test is administered after knowledge or skills have (hopefully) been acquired. In the authentic assessment model, the same authentic task used to measure the students' ability to apply the knowledge or skills is used as a vehicle for student learning. For example, when presented with a real-world problem to solve, students are learning in the process of developing a solution, teachers are facilitating the process, and the students' solutions to the problem becomes an assessment of how well the students can meaningfully apply the concepts.

Authentic assessments provide multiple paths to demonstration. We all have different strengths and weaknesses in how we learn. Similarly, we are different in how we can best *demonstrate* what we have learned. Regarding the traditional assessment model, answering multiple-choice questions does not allow for much variability in how students demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Authentic tasks tend to give the students more freedom in how they will demonstrate what they have learned. By carefully identifying the criteria of good performance on the authentic task ahead of time, the teacher can still make comparable judgments of student performance even though student performance might be expressed quite differently from student to student.

Method

Data Collection

In order to find answers to the research question “What are the language teaching instructors’ ideas and attitude toward authentic assessment in language teaching classes?”, a questionnaire which is called “Authentic Assessment Inventory for Goal Setting”(O’Malley and Valdez; 1992) has been used in this study(see appendix). This inventory has been applied to 37 randomly-selected instructors from Atilim University Preparatory School of English. This inventory can be used to determine, in terms of the use of authentic assessment, where teachers are now, where they want to be, and what their objectives are regarding the use of such assessment in their classes. The inventory consists of 15 questions that can be answered with three alternatives, mainly, 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = a great deal. A two-hour seminar presentation had been given by the researcher to the subject instructors prior to applying the questionnaire, investigating their general view, knowledge and opinions regarding authentic assessment.

Findings and Results

Answers to the questions in the inventory were handled under two main categories: at what point the instructors are now, and where they wish to be concerning the issue of authentic assessment. Accordingly, findings about the inventory were also examined in two

groups. The responses in each group were analyzed in themselves using the Likert-type-scale.

The results of the “Authentic Assessment Inventory for Goal Setting” were determined individually with a graphic for each question. However, due to space limit in this study only the two graphics which represent the results of the first and second group of answers as a whole have been presented (Table 1 and Table 2). Moreover, it was also believed to be more convenient to take the responses by individuals into consideration in two groups as a whole in the following form:

- where am I now
- where I would like to be

Upon comparing the responses within the two groups, it was found that the answer “somewhat” in the first group and the answer “a great deal” in the second group were significantly higher. It was also observed that the answer “not at all”, appearing significantly in the first group, greatly decreased in the second group.

Table 1

First group of answers

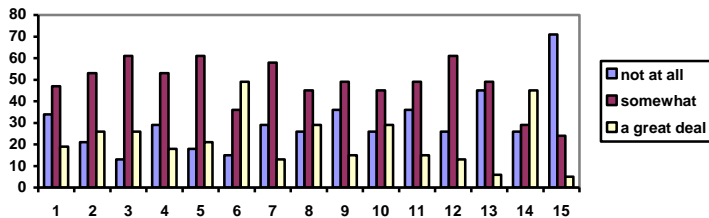
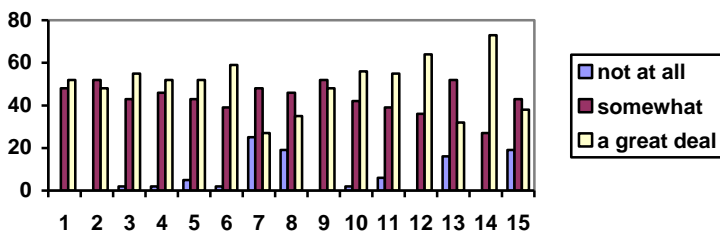


Table 2

Second group of answers



Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the “Authentic Assessment Inventory for Goal Setting” applied to the English language instructors who have been presented a two-hour informative seminar on authentic assessment were investigated in two different categories as ‘where they are now’ and ‘where they want to be’. Although the individuals who participated in this inventory appeared to have limited knowledge of the subject (as established through a set of questions and answers prior to the presentation), the results indicate the participants strong sense of inclination toward goal setting in their classes with regards to authentic assessment. The gap between the responses in the first and second group of has shown that the instructors intend to move beyond the point where they presently are.

In the light of these findings, it can be stated that it will be pedagogically useful to attach more importance to authentic assessment in curriculum and educational programs of language teaching. Moreover, whereas only the instructors’ attitude and opinions have been taken into consideration in this study concerning authentic assessment, it is believed that it is necessary to examine students’ ideas and opinions about the issue as well. Finally, it is recommended that more scientific research be conducted about authentic assessment, in particular on goal-setting, educational planning and program development.

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Yabancı Dil Öğretmenlerinin Dil Öğretiminde Özgün Değerlendirme Yöntemlerinin Kullanımına Karşı Tutumları

Özet

Araştırma Konusu: Eğitimde geleneksel ölçme yöntemlerine karşı farklı seçenekler bulma konusunda hızla artan bir eğilim göze çarpmaktadır. En azından 30 yıldır, öğretmenler, eğitim izlencelerini geliştiren ve programlarını yöneten kişiler öğrencilerin bilgi ve becerilerini değerlendirmek için uygun yöntemleri belirlemeye çalışmaktadırlar. "Özgün Değerlendirme" terimi eğitim alanındaki bu ihtiyaçtan ortaya çıkmıştır, ve "öğrencilerin eğitsel olarak ilgili sınıf etkinlikleri hakkındaki öğrenme, başarı, motivasyon ve tutumlarını yansıtan değerlendirmenin birden fazla şekli" olarak tanımlanabilir (O'Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 4). Nispeten yeni ve ilgi çekici bir konu olduğu göz önüne alındığında, yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin özgün değerlendirmeye yönelik algı ve tutumlarının incelenmesinin oldukça önemli olduğu gözlenmiştir.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu çalışmada, özgün değerlendirme kullanımı ile ilgili İngilizce okutmanlarının fikir ve görüşlerini belirlemeyi amaçlayan bir anket uygulanmış ve araştırmanın sonuçları sunulmuş ve tartışılmıştır.

Araştırma Yöntemi: Bu çalışmada araştırma sorusu olan "Yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin dil öğretimi sınıflarında özgün değerlendirmeye yönelik tutumları nedir?" sorusuna yanıt aramak için "Özgün Değerlendirme Hedef Belirleme Envanteri" (O'Malley ve Valdez, 1992) olarak adlandırılan bir anket kullanılmıştır. Bu envanter Atılım Üniversitesi İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu'ndan rastgele seçilmiş 37 öğrenciye uygulanmıştır. Envanter üç seçenekli cevapları olan 15 sorudan oluşmaktadır. Cevaplar temel olarak 1 = hiç, 2 = kısmen, 3 = oldukça şeklindedir.

Bulgular: Özgün Değerlendirme Hedef Belirleme Envanteri'ndeki sorulara verilen cevaplar iki ana başlık altında ele alınmıştır: okutmanlar özgün değerlendirme ile ilgili konularda şu anda hangi noktadalar ve bu konuyla ilgili ne düzeyde olmak istiyorlar.

Sonuç ve Öneriler: Bu çalışmadan elde edilmiş sonuç, Yabancı dil öğretimi eğitim izlençe ve programlarında özgün değerlendirmeye daha fazla önem verilmesinin eğitsel olarak yararlı olacaktır. Ayrıca, özellikle hedef belirleme, eğitsel planlama ve program geliştirme

konularında, özgün değerlendirme ile ilgili daha fazla bilimsel araştırma yürütülmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özgün değerlendirme, geleneksel değerlendirme, dil öğretimi, ölçme ve değerlendirme.