THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING ACADEMIC READING- TEXTBOOK AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Igballe Miftari- Fetishi
International Balkan University, North Macedonia, i.miftari@ibu.edu.mk

Abstract: Assessment has evidently proven to be a baseline parameter in effective planning and instruction. The reason behind the effectiveness of the process lies in knowing the learners prior tothe application of materials, methods and tasks. According to Gupta (2007), "areas requiring analysis should include: the subject to be taught, the learners, the learners' knowledge and skills compared to the knowledge and skills required, the learners' attitudes (towards learning and change) and problem solving. (*Gupta, K. 2007, A practical guide to needs assessment*). Even though assessment is preferably implemented at any stage of the process, it is highly recommended at the acquaintance phase especially. At this phase, the teacher should make a balance of own perceptions and beliefs, the circumstances and the students' level of proficiency. Applying a close examination to all the above-mentioned factors equips teachers with the needed information regarding the group of learners and provides teachers with the needed insights. Both elements are closely linked to the overall success of the course and the students' overall success in academic reading. The act of planning courses and syllabuses is the act of thinking and assessing; it is the act of procedural aims and achievement aims. This process is easier said than done because theory and practice rarely "go together" The achievement of successful courses and successful learners is therefore dependent on the right choices, both on the materials and the methods to be used. In terms of academic reading, the skill is quite difficult itself. Students are required to know certain vocabulary, to have a certain level of English proficiency and certain prior knowledge in order to be involved in the reading.
This paper aims to further develop the relevance of assessment regarding two issues: textbook assessment and student assessment. It provides personal experience and also the theoretical aspect of assessing textbooks and students and the needed criteria.
Keywords: assessment, textbook, effective planning and instruction, learners knowledge etc.

1. INTRODUCTION: ASSESSSING AND TESTING TEXTBOOKS

Effective planning and syllabus design cannot be accomplished if teachers lack materials and course books prior to planning and if they lack the needed information. The reason for this is due to not having a clear insight of what to include when, what content to focus on, what topics to deal with etc. Every teacher knows that checking course book contents and lessons is the beginning of effective design. If teachers are to plan for reading skills and have a certain student level in mind, they would normally check three or four different course books and examine tasks and activities. Moreover, teaching academic content subjects requires choosing comprehensible, up to date material. I have experienced failure of chosen material due to not having a clear description of what the subject should cover. This happened 5 years ago when assigned to teach a new subject "The development of standard English" along with the other courses I had been teaching for many years. Not having anyone to consult with, I managed to find books online relating to the subject matter and everything seemed fit to the requirements of the course. I assumed that everything was under control, the materials seemed appropriate and so I designed the syllabus according to a book I liked most. The thing with planning (theory) and teaching (practice) is just as the similarity of "night and day." (if there is any) I noticed that the lesson was not going well only after I began to teach the subject matter. The chapters were inconsistent, the topics were not properly covered and this situation caused confusion. After week two of lectures, I managed to find some very good material, re-planned the syllabus and changed the textbook. Things began to go smoothly. Both the students and I finally began liking the subject. Everything started to make sense. One bad decision that I made would have caused failure of course and students would have most likely not chosen the subject the next semester. One thing that I judged the first course book on was its' title and not as much on its' content. When looking for content materials, teachers normally base their findings on the cover, the title, the authors or even upon a colleague's impression. They tend to forget that the inner book differs from its cover and that a colleague might have had a different perspective in mind, a different objective etc. Baldwin (1986) describes this issue as follows: "if textbooks are not always boring, reading them is at least hard work. They tend to be impersonal, non-emotional presentations of facts; and almost by definition, textbooks are difficult. Tremendous amounts of information and associated terminology are compressed into relatively few pages…and it is not hard to see why so many students consider so many textbooks to be so much drudgery. (1986, p. 323)Accordingly, Alvermann& Phelps (2002) provide a framework that teachers can use to assess text materials, based on 4 elements: the content, the format, the utility and the style. (See Fig. 1)

Content-Does the content complement the curriculum? Is the content current? Is there balance between depth and breadth of coverage? How many new or difficult vocabulary terms are included and how are they introduced and defined? How dense are the new concepts in the text? Is the content generally appropriate to students' prior knowledge?

Format-Are there good graphic aids and illustrations? Are they distracting or irrelevant to the content? How are chapters set up? Are there introductions, summaries, heads and subheads, and marginal notes? Are layout and print attractive and easy to read? How useful are the index, glossary, etc.?

Utility-How good are the activities at the end of the chapters? Do text questions call for interpretation, evaluation and applications as well as literal recall? Is there a teacher's manual? Would it be helpful? Are quizzes or test questions provided? How good are they? Does the text or manual suggest additional readings or related trade books?

Style- Is the writing lively and interesting to read? Is the syntax at a suitable level of complexity? Is the writing coherent and clear?

Another problematic issue regarding textbook assessment and choosing appropriate materials is having little choice (or none). Every English teacher in the region has encountered the case of lacking appropriate materials or been "handicapped" in free choice because the department or school has already chosen one book for every subject. The issue of "flexibility" is an issue that is rarely treated. One thing we can do as teachers' is use authentic materials as best as we can, with modification; Broten& Yule (1983) state "in relation to the intended listener, they suggest that texts, particularly 'authentic' texts which are not addressed to the listener, may be boring to the learner and therefore difficult to process. They go on to state that:. . . it is, in principle, not possible to find material which would interest everyone. It follows that the emphasis should be moved from attempting to provide intrinsically interesting materials, which we have just claimed is generally impossible, to doing interesting things with materials . . . these materials should be chosen, not so much on the basis of their own interest, but for what they can be used to do. (Broten and Yule 1983, p.83)

2. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Teachers tend to test students and their achievement from day 1. They tend to examine students' level at the beginning and then see them progress during their FL experience and of course try to help them surpass their difficulties in content subjects and academic reading. The term *assessment* is regarded as "the gathering and interpreting of information about or evidence of learning… …through assessment we find out whether and to what extent learners are learning the content as set out in the goals and objectives." (Graves, 2014, p. 60) Accordingly, assessment addresses the following questions:

1. What is the learner supposed to learn/ be able to do?
2. What is evidence of that learning?
3. What kinds of tasks will enable learners to provide that evidence?
4. How will the evidence be evaluated?
5. What will happen with the results? (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)

Accordingly, "effective assessments are practical to use and transparent to learners. They are both formative (they provide evidence along the way) and summative (they provide culminating, integrated evidence of learning)." (2014, p. 60). As teachers, we begin our day with aims and objectives and end it with the self-reflection of the intentions and the accomplishments. Accordingly, it is the same regarding our learners. Teachers want to get better acquainted with their capacities, with their level, with their attitude regarding tasks and activities; they want to know how well students can do in midterms and exams, on tests, oral presentations. Teachers therefore design tools and use instruments that will justify intended outcomes and results.

Sharkey & Cade (2008) describe the procedure of assessment as follows:

> "The first step in this process was making sure students knew what the learning objectives were, why those objectives were important and then consistently encouraging students to identify and reflect on what they were learning and how they were learning it. The learning objectives, key vocabulary and concepts were posted in a prominent position in the classroom and students

became accustomed to referring to them at different points of the day and throughout the week." (2008, p. 186)

The following is a detailed description of the purposes and benefits of assessment. As you may notice, the advantages and benefits of assessment are important for both the teacher and the learners. First and foremost, teachers identify what needs review (since the focus is academic reading, then teachers test students reading ability/ reading comprehension skills, since by university level students are past decoding and letter recognition); then, after student current level is known, teachers can monitor further success and accomplishment. Teacher instruction is also "carved" and decisions are therefore made accordingly to students needs either as a group or as individuals. The effectiveness of instruction can also be measured by overall, ongoing assessment. Teachers can distinguish what was effective and what not, and change accordingly.

Research provides evidence that specific early literacy concepts can predict young students' later reading achievement (DeBruinParecki, 2004). These reading concepts include letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. An effective reading program includes assessments of all of these concepts for several purposes.
One purpose is to identify skills that need review. Assessment provides teachers with information on what skills students have and have not mastered. It is needed to help teachers know the skill levels of their students, since students have varying experiences and knowledge.
A second purpose is to monitor student progress. A teacher can learn which students need review before covering additional content and which students are ready to move forward.
A third purpose is to guide teacher instruction. Through consistent assessment, a teacher can make informed decisions about what instruction is appropriate for each student.
A fourth purpose is to demonstrate the effectiveness of instruction. The information gained from assessment allows teachers to know if all students are mastering the content covered. It is important for teachers to use instructional time effectively, and this can be done when teachers are knowledgeable about what their students are ready to learn and what they already know. Therefore, the information gained from assessment allows a teacher to create appropriate instruction for their students.
Additionally, a fifth purpose of assessment is to provide teachers with information on how instruction can be improved.

(Ret. on March 2016 from http://www.readingrockets.org/article/early-reading-assessment-guiding-tool-instruction)

The effectiveness of reading comprehension can also be assessed. Some items that can be monitored throughout the reading are mentioned below. (Table 1)

Table 1. The effectiveness of reading comprehension items

Before Reading
What strategies do students use for selecting a text?
How do students approach a text? (Do they skim through it? Read the title page? Look at the end pages and other peritextual information?
Are students able to state their purposes for reading a particular text?
When and where do students choose to read?
During Reading
Do students demonstrate immediate emotional reactions (laugh, cry, etc.)?
Can students code or mark important passages in the text during reading for further inquiry?
Do students stop and think aloud during their reading? What do the students talk about?
As students read a text, what strategies do they employ? Are they reading fluently or is the reading choppy? Can they adjust their rate of reading to ensure understanding?
After Reading
Are students able to talk about the text when they are finished? Can they paraphrase or summarize what they have read? Do students draw inferences from the text?
Can students write a response entry in their literature response notebook?
Are students able to answer questions about what they have read?
Can students respond in other ways (write a book review, draw a picture, act out the story) to what they have read?

Taken from: Sources of information about reading, Serafini, F. 2010, Classroom reading assessments: More efficient ways to view and evaluate your learners. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.)

3. IDENTIFYING QUALITY ASSESSMENT CHARACTERISTICS

According to Dean & Schiffbauer (2003), "quality assessment must be multifaceted and meaningful…it should include the following characteristics:

1. *Assessments must have both formative (ongoing) and summative (final) components*. Formative assessments are used frequently so that teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction and make adaptations to ensure student learning; summative assessments can be used as one measure of programs and of student progress.

2. *Studentsneed multiple kinds of assessment.* Individual student assessments such as teacher anecdotal records, traditional multiple-choice and essay tests, portfolios, and teacher-student conferences are all helpful types of assessment. In addition, assessment should involve students working in groups or pairs.

3. *Assessment should be fair and equitable.* Rubrics provide a way to connect requirements to assessments. Because rubrics help students understand at the onset what is expected of them, they are more likely to feel the assessment is fair and equitable.

4. *People other than teachers should be included in the assessment process.* This community includes teachers, students, parents, administrators etc.

5. *Quality assessment uses multiple types of texts, incorporates a variety of strategies and processes, and allows for a variety of responses.* Students should be reading a variety of texts including the traditional published forms such as short stories, novel, biographies, autobiographies, poetry and textbooks as well as newspapers, magazines, journals etc. In addition, students need to know how to read and interact with a variety of media including film, television etc.

6. *Students should be involved in constructing assessments.* One way of helping students understand the structure of tests as well as learning what is important in the academic content is to show them how to construct tests. A starting point in the process of helping students construct assessments is explaining Bloom's taxonomy and the kinds of questions and activities associated with each level. (2003, pg. 206 - 207)

4. CONCLUSION

What our students know prior reading is crucial, but assisting them in overcoming difficulties during reading is also our task. Knowing their level, interest and needs will help teachers make the right decisions when selecting reading materials and when planning.Providing them with the autonomy in assessing themselves, reflecting on their reading experience and providing us with insights and suggestions will facilitate this burden. Making flexible lesson plans and syllabuses, with different types of reading materials including authentic materials and literature always helps. Variety of materials and tasks is a must. Teachers must provide students with different materials and tasks, use different strategies and approaches; academic reading should become an everyday activity for students. Foreign language acquisition is best mastered through reading, and therefore reading should be practiced and well-planned.

REFERENCES

Alderson, J. C. (1999). *Reading constructs and reading assessment. In Chalhoub-Deville, M. , editor, Issues in computer adaptive testing of reading proficiency. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press* .

Alderson, J. C. 2000: Assessing reading. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press .

Allen, J. 1999. *Words, words, words: Teaching vocabulary in grades 4-12*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers)

Alexander, P. A., & Jetton, T. L. (2000). Learning from text: A multidimensional and developmental perspective. In M. L. Kamil, P. BMosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research: Vol. III* (pp. 285-310). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Anderson, R. C., & Freebody, P. (1981).Vocabulary knowledge. In J. Guthrie (Ed.), Comprehensionand teaching: Research reviews (pp. 77-117). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Anderson, R. C., & Freebody, P. (1983).Reading comprehension and the assessment and acquisition of word knowledge. In B. Hutson (Ed.), Advances in reading/language research (pp. 231-256).Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Anderson, N.J. (1991). Individual differences in strategy use in second language reading and testing.*Modern Language Journal, 75, 460-472.*

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives (a bridged ed.). New York: Longman.

Anderson, N. J. (2012). Reading instruction. In J. Richards and A. Burns (Eds.),

Armbruster, B. B., & Anderson, T. H. (1988).On selecting considerate content textbooks. Remedial and Special Education

Armbruster, B. Lehr, F. & Osborn, J. (2001). Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read! by the National Institute for Literacy.

Beck, I.L., Omanson, R.C., and McKeown, M.G. (1982). An instructional redesign Of reading lessons: Effects on comprehension. Reading Research Quarterly, 17, 462-481.

Beck, I.L., Perfetti, C.A., and McKeown, M.G. (1982).Effects of long-term Vocabulary instruction on lexical access and reading comprehension.Reading Research Quarterly, 17, 462-481.

Beck, I.L. and McKeown, M.G. (1986). Instructional research in reading: A Retrospective. In J. Orasanu (Ed.), Reading comprehension: From research To practice (pp. 113-134). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Biggs, J. (1999). Teaching for Quality Learning at University, SHRE and Open University Press.

Biggs, J. (2003).Teaching for Quality Learning at University (2nd edition).

Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education /Open University Press.

Black, P. (2013). Pedagogy in theory and in practice: Formative and summative assessments in classrooms and in systems. In D. Corrigan, R. Gunstone & A. Jones (Eds.), Valuing assessment in science education: Pedagogy, curriculum, policy (pp. 207-229). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Black, P., Harrison, C., Hodgen, J., Marshall, B. & Serret, N. (2013). Inside the black box of assessment: Assessment of learning by teachers and schools London, UK: GL Assessment.

Blachowicz, C. L. Z., & Fisher, P. (2000).Vocabulary instruction. In R. Barr, P. Mosenthal, P. S. Pearson, & M. Kamil (Eds.), Handbook of reading research, volume III. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Bowden, J &Marton, F. (2000).The University of Learning. London: Kogan Page.

Brindley, G. P. (1984), Needs Analysis and Objective Setting in the Adult Migrant Education Program. Sydney, Australia: N.S.W. Adult Migrant Education Service.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989).Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher, 18* (1), 32-42.

BROWN, A.L., & CAMPIONE, J.C**.,** (1994) Guided Discovery in a Community of Learners. K. McGilly (Ed.) Classroom lessons: Integrating cognitive theory and classroom practice, pp. 229-270, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books.

Cortina, J. & Elder, J. (1998). Opening doors: *Understandingcollege reading*. 2nd edition, Richland College.

Davidson, M., Lickona, T., & Khmelkov, V. (2014). Smart & Good Schools: A new paradigm for high school character education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T.

Krettanauer (Eds.), Handbook of moral and character education (2nd ed., pp. 290-307). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dereli-Iman, E. (2014). The effect of the values education programme on 5.5-6 year old children's social development: Social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills. Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 14(1), 262-268.

Davidson, M., Lickona, T., & Khmelkov, V. (2014). Smart & Good Schools: A new paradigm for high school character education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T.

Krettanauer (Eds.), Handbook of moral and character education (2nd ed., pp. 290-307). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dereli-Iman, E. (2014). The effect of the values education programme on 5.5-6 year old children's social development: Social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills. Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 14(1), 262-268.

Davidson, M., Lickona, T., & Khmelkov, V. (2014). Smart & Good Schools: A new paradigm for high school character education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T.

Krettanauer (Eds.), Handbook of moral and character education (2nd ed., pp. 290-307). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dereli-Iman, E. (2014). The effect of the values education programme on 5.5-6 year old children's social development: Social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills. Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 14(1), 262-268.

Davidson, M., Lickona, T., & Khmelkov, V. (2014). Smart & Good Schools: A new paradigm for high school character education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T. Krettanauer (Eds.), Handbook of moral and character education (2nd ed., pp. 290- 307). New York, NY: Routledge.

Davis, F. B. (1944). Fundamental factors of comprehension in reading.Psychometrika, 9, 185–197.

Davis, F.B. (1968). Research in comprehension in reading.*Reading Research Quarterly*, 3, 499-545

Day, R. R., & Park, J. S. (2005).Developing reading comprehension questions.Reading in a Foreign Language, 17(1), 60-73.

Dean, N., Schiffbauer, J. 2003, assessment that guides interaction, pg. 206, 207, cited in *Reading and the high school student, strategies to enhance literacy*, Irvin et al., Pearson Education, Inc.)

Dereli-Iman, E. (2014). The effect of the values education programme on 5.5-6 year old children's social development: Social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills. Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 14(1), 262-268.

Dubin, F., &Bycina, D. (1991).Academic Reading and the ESL/EFL Teacher. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (2nd ed., pp. 195-215). New York: Newbury House.

Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S. (2000). Teaching Reading in Multilingual Classrooms. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gagne, R. M., Wagner, W. W., Goals, K. C., & Keller, J. M. (2005). Principles of Instructional Design (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Graves, K. (2008). The language curriculum: A social contextual perspective. Language Teaching. 41 (2), 149-183.

Gray, D. E. (2014). Doing Research in the Real World (3rd edn). London: Sage.

Kame'enui, E. J. & Simmons, D. C. (1990).Designing instructional strategies: The prevention of academic learning problems. Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company.

Kame'enui, E. J., & Simmons, D. C. (2000). Planning and evaluation tool for effective schoolwide reading programs. Eugene, OR: Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement.

Kayl, H. (2008). Developing an ESL Curriculum Based on Needs and Situation Analysis: A Case Study.Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 4 (1), 29-49.

Littlewood, W. (1984). Foreign and second language learning: language acquisition research and its implications for the classroom. Cambridge University Press.

Mambu, J. E. (2015). Challenges in assessing character education in ELT: Implications from a case study in a Christian university. TEFLIN Journal, 26(2), 183.

McKeown, M., Beck, I., Sinatra, G., &Loxterman, J. (1992).The contribution of prior knowledge and coherent text to comprehension. Reading Research Quarterly, 27 (1), 79-93.

Nagy, W., R. Anderson, and Herman, P. (1987).Learning word meanings from context during normal reading. American Educational Research Journal, 24, 237-270.

Nagy, W., & P. Herman. 1987. Breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge: Implications for acquisition and instruction. In M. McKeown & M. Curtiss. (Eds.) The nature of vocabulary acquisition (pp. 19-35), Hillsdale, NJ: Erbaum.

Nation, I. S. P. & John Macalister (2010).Language Curriculum Design. New York & London: Routledge.

Newton, P. E. & Shaw, S.D. (2014). Validity in educational and psychological assessment. London UK : Sage

Nunan, D. 1988: Syllabus design. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Qoyyimah, U. (2015). EFL teachers' professional dilemmas with moral curriculum reform in Indonesia. (Thesis). Queensland University of Technology.

Retnawati, H., Hadi, S., & Nugraha, A. C. (2016). Vocational High School Teachers' Difficulties in Implementing the Assessment in Curriculum 2013 in Richardson, R. C., Tolson, H., Huang, T. Y., & Lee, Y. H. (2009). Character education: Lessons for teaching social and emotional competence. Children & Schools, 31(2), 71-78.

Troutman, P. R. (2014). Teachers' perceptions of aspects of character education programming: Importance, efficacy, and practice. Doctoral dissertation. Regent University.

Wiliam, D. (2010). What counts as evidence of educational achievement? The role of constructs in the pursuit of equity in assessment. In A. Luke, J. Green & G. Kelly (Eds.), What counts as evidence in educational settings? Rethinking equity, diversity and reform in the 21st century (pp. 254-284). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Wiliam, D. (2011). Embedded formative assessment. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Wiliam, D. (2014). The right questions, the right way: What do the questions teachers ask in class really reveal about student learning? Educational Leadership, 71(6), 16-19.

Serafini, F. (2010).Classroom reading assessments.More efficient ways to view and evaluate your readers.Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

Shapiro, E. S. (2004). Academic skills problems: direct assessment and intervention(3nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005).Understanding by design. (2nd edition) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.