Functions of Testing In Foreign Language Teaching At A Non-Language University

MATIBAEVA Razia Baltabaevna,
International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan,
RYSBEKOVA Lazzat Kasymbekovna
International Kazakh-Turkish University named after H.A. Yasawi

Abstract: This article examines the functions of testing in teaching a foreign language to students of non-language universities. It considers the implications of testing on the learning process and looks at various test functions from teaching and learning perspectives. The article addresses the importance of this method of assessing a learner's progress, which provides invaluable feedback on the teaching and learning process. In contrast to subjective forms of assessment, testing provides a more objective measurement of learning outcomes. Thorough analysis of testing results allows for the definition of the learners' problem areas, the building of foundations for correcting mistakes, and the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.
Keywords: testing, assessment, target language, learning objective, a learner's progress, ability, learning outcomes

In the context of globalization, the overall ability to speak foreign languages has become a necessary and important target for the successful training of future professionals in non-language universities, primarily due to the need to develop and improve language competencies that will enable graduates to successfully interact with foreign partners. This is a crucial factor both for the personal and professional development of graduates and their employability in the global labor market. Nowadays, a highly qualified graduate is expected not only to communicate in their specialism fields but also to interact in real-life situations and be able to use the target language in different social contexts.

To achieve these, it is necessary to improve the efficiency of teaching a foreign language in an educational setting in terms of both teaching methods and evaluation of learning. Management of the teaching and learning process in any educational institution is effective only if there is an adequate feedback system. Such feedback can be provided through testing, thorough evaluation, and interpretation of its results. According to Hughes, good testing practice "supports good teaching" and provides opportunities to correct bad teaching. [9:2]

The discourse about the role of testing in foreign language teaching in educational settings has been largely confined to the testing functions, their benefits and drawbacks, and the ratio between objective and subjective testing. This ratio mainly depends on the methodology applied in teaching foreign languages in any given institution, as well as on the availability of relevant tests, opportunities for test construction, and other circumstances. The higher the administrative and organizational level of assessment is and, accordingly, the higher the stakes for students and the scope of material covered, the higher the need for a testing methodology.

Tests as controlling and measuring tools have long attracted the attention of foreign language methodologists because of their comparative advantages over other forms of assessment. These, in particular, include the ability to simultaneously work with a large contingent of students, their quickness in getting test results, and their prompt communication with students.

The issue of testing has been addressed by many experts in the field.

The American methodologist Brown D. [6:14] defines testing as a method of measuring a learner's overall ability, certain areas of knowledge, or specific skills. He makes a distinction between a test as a set of tasks and a test or testing as a process and method of assessment.

Tests can thus be defined as a set of tasks prepared in accordance with certain requirements and quality indicators. They allow the tester to evaluate learners' degree of overall language ability and communicative competence and help make informed decisions about their proficiency and progress, as well as identify their problem areas.

Brown [5:401] considers the use of testing in teaching foreign languages through the study of various types of tests and methods of test administration, acknowledging that "tests are crucial milestones in the journey to success." The issues of testing as a method of assessment have also been addressed by Alderson et al. [1], Hughes [10], Weir [12], and other authors. McNamara [11] has explored the ethical dimension of language testing in terms of such life-changing consequences as getting citizenship, asylum, or a work permit.

There is a general understanding among most researchers in this field [1, 10, 11, 12] that testing and measuring a person's ability or competence is an important part of the teaching and learning process. According to Bachman [2:60], almost any language test can provide information about learners' problem areas. In fact, it is the administration of testing and the interpretation of its results that the success of the whole learning process depends on. Therefore, one of the major concerns with testing is the extent of its accuracy in assessing a test-taker's competence in a given area. [12:1].

According to Hughes [10:6], different institutions may need entirely different types of tests arising from the course objectives, the available resources, and the stake value of the tests. The main issue here is that any given situation demands a particular type of testing.

Testing is one of the most standardized and objective methods of monitoring and evaluating the knowledge and skills of a test-taker in that it is devoid of the traditional limitations of other methods of assessment, such as the lack of specification of the material tested, the subjectivity of examiners, and a vague evaluation system.

Testing is, in fact, a significant step forward in developing an objective system of assessing the learners' overall language ability and checking their progress and achievement on the basis of the material covered.

Hughes [10:1] points out that the main goal of testing is 'to measure accurately whatever it is they are intended to measure'. Testing provides information about what a student can do and about the state of the learning process as a whole. Hughes [2] argues that the proper relationship between teaching and testing is interdependent in that they complement each other and that testing should support good teaching and inform decisions to improve bad teaching.

Proficiency in a foreign language is measured as the overall language ability of the test-taker based on the assessment of language systems such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax and the testing of language communication skills such as listening and speaking, reading and

writing, spoken production, and interaction [8:1]. As Hughes [10:8] points out, testing, being a matter of problem solving, does not only measure the learners' language ability and their progress so far, but also "diagnoses their strengths and weaknesses" and allows to stream them into a group of students with a similar level of proficiency.

The role of testing in foreign language teaching and learning has been growing of late. The interest in testing can be explained by the fact that, in addition to its main function of control and assessment, it can serve as a means of diagnosing the problem areas of students, measuring the learning outcomes, and predicting the success or failure of training.

Testing in foreign language teaching and learning can pursue different goals, but, in any case, it is not an end in itself but a means to improve the learning process, replace ineffective methods of teaching and learning with more effective ones, build foundations for correcting mistakes and improving practical language skills, and educate students by means of a foreign language.

Measuring overall language ability and progress on a language program is of great importance for learners as well. It helps each student to understand where they are and what progress has been made in learning a foreign language over a given period of time, what their problem areas are, and what needs to be done for further progress. Reliable objective assessment is an incentive for a learner's further progress.

Functions of testing have been examined by Bachman [1], Brown [4, 5, 6], Hughes [10], Weir [12], Carr [7], and many other methodologists. Testing, in their opinion, performs such functions as evaluating, learning, diagnostic, controlling, motivating, and pedagogical.

In light of these, good testing practice requires a clear understanding of testing, its functions and objectives, forms, and techniques.

One of the most important functions of testing is measuring test-takers' performance, i.e., achievement of a certain level of foreign language proficiency or acquisition of a certain amount of knowledge. Equally important is the learning function of testing in that the content, teaching, and testing methods are of an educational nature and may affect test-takers' learning patterns.

This means that testing should contribute to the process of teaching and learning and relate to their objectives.

The teaching function of testing lies in the fact that testing allows an educational institution to measure the level of language competence at the end of a particular unit, course strand, term, or academic year. It mostly refers to open tests with freely constructed answers and multiple-choice tests, as learners often do not just choose from test items but first construct their answers and then compare them with the suggested ones.

Testing makes the pedagogical nature of assessment more evident since the completion of test tasks, carefully constructed and selected on the basis of preliminary testing, systematizes the acquired knowledge and skills. The execution of test tasks requires not only knowledge of the material covered but also the ability to analyze and generalize, systematize, compare and contrast, and other important skills. Thus, testing contributes greatly to developing a learner's intellect and logic.

In accordance with the testing methodology, test items are designed precisely to check the material covered. They perform a controlling function that is considered a key element of assessment and an integral part of the learning process. In an educational setting, they relate specifically to the official curriculum of the establishment.

Most researchers acknowledge the significance of testing as a tool in learners' assessment; they point out that tests are instrumental in "making decisions about learners." [7:1] Testing encourages students to work on a regular basis. This function gives the entire learning process a selective character, directing the students' mental activity to precisely what is important at a certain stage of the pedagogical process. Testing performs educational functions also at the stage of revising for the test as well as during its execution, when learners have to overcome various psycholinguistic, mental, and other challenges, that is, by encouraging willpower, a sense of purpose, diligence, and other positive personal traits.

Specifically important is the motivating function of testing, which is instrumental in creating incentives for learning a foreign language.

The motivating function relates directly to the assessment function of testing. Tests yield data for quantitative analysis; adequate assessment and interpretation of a test's score have a positive psychological and pedagogical impact on the learning process. A group of positive motives emerge to guide the learning activities of a learner and make them more meaningful.

In an educational setting, testing is an integral part of the learning process and is used for checking the material covered and evaluating learners' progress within a certain educational program.

Thus, good testing practice provides useful feedback on the learning outcomes as it diagnoses learners' problem areas to be addressed in the further teaching process. On the one hand, this feedback allows us to redesign the syllabus and modify teaching and learning methods as well as materials and activities in order to eliminate language gaps and improve learners' overall language ability. Learners, on the other hand, gain better awareness of their problem areas and motivation to overcome them. Baranovskaya and Shaforosova [3:31] note that such feedback allows for ascertaining learners' performance on the test and aligning the existing curriculum based on the learning outcomes.

The potential of testing as a controlling and measuring tool, given its objective character and its positive effect on language teaching and learning, can only be realized when language teachers and test makers gain full awareness of the principles of designing a valid test. Testing the four language skills in different situations, as Galaczi [9] points out, is crucial to increasing test accuracy.

Good testing practice should also be in compliance with government-imposed educational standards that, among other issues, demand reliability and validity in measuring the level of a learner's progress and achievement within a particular educational framework.

Testing is a significant step forward in developing an objective system of assessing the learners' overall language ability and checking their progress and achievement on the basis of the material covered or curriculum of the educational institution.

References:
1. Alderson, C., Clapham, C., and Wall, D. (1995). Language Test Construction and Evaluation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
2. Bachman, L. (1990), Uses of Language Tests (pp. 58–60) in Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing, Oxford: Oxford University Press

3. Baranovskaya, T., & Shaforostova, V. (2017). Assessment and evaluation techniques Journal of Language and Education, 3(2), 30-38. https://doi.org/10.17323/2411-7390-2017-3-2-30-38

4. Brown, D. (2014) Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, 6th edition. White Plains: Pearson Education, Inc.

5. Brown, D.; Heekyeong, L. (2015) Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy, 4th edition. White Plains: Pearson Education, Inc.

6. Brown, D. (2018). Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices, 3rd edition. White Plains: Pearson Education, Inc.

7. Carr, N. (2011). Designing and Analyzing Language Tests. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

8. Council of Europe: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages retrieved 26/05/2019

9. Galaczi, E. Benefits of Testing the Four Skills (Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking), 27/06/2018, https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/blog/benefits-of-testing-the-four-skills/, retrieved May 26, 2019.

10. Hughes, A. (2013). Testing for Language Teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

11. McNamara, T. (2000). Language Study Series: Language Testing. Oxford: Oxford University Press

12. Weir, C. (2005). Language Testing and Validation. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan