AUTHENTIC TESTING TECHNIQUES FOR ASSESSING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Standardised testing tools provide validity and reliability and practicality for assessing language skills so as to evaluate the learning outcomes and comprehend the fulfilling of objectives and method or approaches used in the teaching and learning process. The main objective of this paper is to point out reliable testing tools for assessing the productive skill of writing. Testing tools determine the quality of learning outcome and analyse the content knowledge of learners. Several testing tools, grammaticality judgement, paraphrase, and cloze test, are considered as reliable testing tools based on evidences from some studies. Also, the way of framing questions for these tools are discussed to access the performance of learners. The testing tools definitely assess accurate learning outcome and improve the learning process.

KEY WORDS: Validity, Reliability, Learning, Grammaticality Judgement, Paraphrase, Testing Tools

Assessment is considered the most important ways of improving teaching and learning process in language learning. Assessment of language skills requires ideas and procedures to test the knowledge of learners. In connection with the assessment, Assessment Reform Group (2002) listed ten guiding principles for assessment for learning: part of effective planning, focuses on how students learn, central to classroom practice, a key professional skill, sensitive and constructive, fosters motivation, understanding of goals and criteria, helps learners know how to improve, develops the capacity for self- assessment and recognizes all educational achievement. These principles guide for the effective ways of assessing the knowledge of learners.

Evaluation of learning is "the process of quantifying the observed performance of classroom learners" (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 4). The observation and systematic procedure of testing the language skills improve teaching and learning process. The self-assessment of test taker diagnoses the process of learning and help to improve the use of the language skill. Bachman and Palmer (1996) pointed out four features for selecting items: the personal characteristics of the test takers, the knowledge of the topic, personal views on test and their language ability. These traits are interconnected to improve the quality of selecting testing item for standardised test in assessing language skill of writing.

Validity, reliability and practical are the most important principles for standard test in evaluating teaching and learning process. Validity in assessment 'measures accurately what it is intended to measure' (Hughes, 1989: 22). It examines appropriateness of test what is intended in the testing tool and scores of measurements encompass to determine the validity of target task in the given test. Messick views validity as an integrative evaluative judgement of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessment. (Messick 1989: 13). Thus, validity incorporates the accuracy and appropriateness with a view to measure the tasks what is proposed to measure.

Fulcher (2007) views the reliability as 'the consistency of test scores across facets of the test. Authenticity is defined as the relationship between test task characteristics, and the characteristics of tasks in the real world.' (P.15). Language learner's proficiency, educational background, motivations in the target topics and method used in teaching are involved in reliability of test. Moreover, it may affect the testing score in what circumstances the learners taking test. these factors reduce the reliability of test in any testing tools. Though these factors affect the reliable of testing scores, the testing techniques place the most important trait in assessing language proficiency. In essence, Reliability is related with consistency and accuracy of scores in testing.

Practicality denotes to logical, practical, conducting test and assessing the test. Bachman and Palmer (1996) define practicality as "the relationship between the resources that will be required in the design, development,

and use of the test and the resources that will be available for these activities" (P. 36). Also, it includes the environments of test takers, materials used in the test, types of testing tools, relevant context and time.

Tasks are related to real world and everyday life context in assessment in order to involve learners to participate in the test and obtain accurate scores for evaluate the learning process. Norris (1998) defines tasks as, "people do in everyday life and which require language for their accomplishment" (p. 33). The real word tasks stimulate the learners to express appropriate response and create a chance to learn from the mistakes in the test. These types of assessment tasks motivate to perform better in the test and bring to fruition to test takers for attending the test.

Paraphrase an article from Newspapers enables the learners to improve the productive skill of writing. The choice of article must be related to interest of learners for writing. Appropriate use of collocations, transitional devices, place of adjectives and adverbs, structure of paraphrase, sentence construction and meaning have to be considered in the paraphrasing process. Review of written the article is considered the most impact factor in writing paraphrase. The expression of ideas in the form of paraphrasing includes the beginning, middle and conclusion. The main idea of the article should be given in the beginning of the writing. substantiate points with amplifiers such as anecdotes, examples, illustrations, statistical data, personal opinions and quotes place in the middle of the paraphrase. Restatement of the main idea is in the last paragraph and also sum of all the points used for the supporting to main theme of the article. This type of exercise really improves writing skill, especially to develop the skill of paraphrasing.

The term cloze derived from the concept of 'closure' from the Gestalt psychology. Cloze test is a cognitive task in which the reader finds reason form the options to fill the gap based on the indication form the context. This type of tool is required to fill the appropriate word in the given options. The deleted words in the passage are to be content words or structural words. Taylor (1953) studied the first cloze test as an instrument that applied to find out the effective of reading materials in reader's native language in 1953. Later, it was utilised to measure of readability of L1 and L2 materials. The task was used as testing technique in reading comprehension in L1 and L2. This technique used to measure of second language learners' proficiency during the 1970s (Ahluwalia, 1992:82). The language testing tool is widely used in many countries and large-scale language tests.

Grammaticality judgement test (GJT) is used as testing technique in assessing language proficiency in the productive skill of writing. This tool was started to utilize in second language research from the 70s. According to Rimmer (2006), GJTs are "a standard method of determining whether a construction is well-formed … where subjects make an intuitive pronouncement on the accuracy of form and structure in individual decontextualised sentences" (P.246). The test takers judge the right or appropriate answer for the given item to assess the knowledge on topics.

Having given testing tools are produced better performance in the productive skill of writing.
Researches in language testing in writing skill clearly showed that these language testing technique with interesting context resulted in accurate data and help to improve language skill. (Arthy, 2001; Pooja, 2008; Velmurugan, 2008; Minna, 2009; Damodharan, 2011; Franklin, 2011). The studies used these tools for assessing writing skill in order to diagnose the language use in different context. The result of these studies pointed out that the mentioned testing tools are authentic, reliable, and practical in using in the productive skill of writing.

Testing technique is indispensable for assessing cognitive skills, linguistic abilities in language proficiency and developing potential of learners. Validity, reliability and practicality are interlinked to improve the quality of testing technique in assessing productive skill of writing skill. The features for testing tools include knowledge, language ability and personal views on test. In connection with testing item in language test, real world context and interest topics help to stimulate the respondents to response appropriate answer. Some evidences from language research studies showed that grammaticality judgement, paraphrase, and cloze test are reliable testing tools in evaluating the productive skill of writing. These features with real world context and authentic testing tools bring the learners out the effective of learning and assessing appropriate use in the productive skill of writing.

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