

ADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN TEACHING ESP

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Alternative assessment (further AA) represents a direct evaluation of the learners' performance by using contexts and tasks similar to those in real life, while traditional testing measures performance indirectly, by checking knowledge and abilities outside their real context of usage. Teachers have the freedom to use alternative evaluation permanently during the academic year while conventional tests are scheduled on certain dates; students' learning process will be therefore fluctuating.

There is no one sole way to assess in ESP language courses. ESP is an approach; as a result, there is no particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology which defines these language.

AA differs from traditional greatly. The focus is definitely placed on what the students know and can do and not on what they do not know. Grading highlights students' strengths based on clearly stated performance standards rather than counted errors. Therefore, AA has the clear advantage of emphasizing the student's strong points while minimizing their weak points. Moreover, it offers teacher the opportunity not to compare levels and knowledge but to follow a student's evolution individually and in time. AA can be considered as performance assessment since it emphasizes processes and competencies, while it de-emphasizes theoretical scoring outcomes.

Alternative testing is a strategy based on the permanent assessment of students' linguistic level, which is why it is also called formative assessment. There are however methods of AA such as the portfolio or the project which, due to the amount and the complexity of information involve to share the characteristics of formative and summative evaluation, especially if their deadline is the end of the semester or of the academic year.

Studying the very names of the concepts used to define the new type of assessment, there are two characteristics, two terms that are reiterated: performance and authentic, which concentrate in themselves the core characteristics of AA: performance – that is, the student has to produce a directly or indirectly observable response by means of a product – and authentic, which means that the nature of the task and the context in which the assessment is made are relevant and represent aspects of real life.

The purposes of the alternative testing methods are considerably wider than those of conventional tests for the very reason that they are themselves much richer and offer a wide range of possibilities. Alternative testing may include the demonstration of certain abilities by the student, the writing of specific papers, the formulation of answers to open questions.

It is not only the final product that can be assessed and graded, but also the very process of reaching the result, which demonstrate the quality and complexity of the learners' process of thinking. The teaching-learning process moves thus to a superior, richer and more reflexive level of critical thinking and reflection.

From the point of view of the communicative approach, conventional or traditional testing are neither authentic nor communicative. And as far as the teaching and

learning of foreign languages are concerned this phenomenon is more visible and stronger than in the case of any other academic subject.

We may conclude that AA methods are competence oriented and they are based on cognitive abilities and affective learning. The interactive nature of modern teaching extends to the assessment stage of learning, turning it into a valuable tool of practicing communication abilities and competences.

References:

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