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Different types of tests in language learning and teaching

The role of tests is very useful and important in language learning and teaching. It is a means to show how much the learners have learnt during a course. To check the students' knowledge the teacher can apply a great range of assessment techniques, including tests.

Different scientists in their researches ask – why test, do the teachers really need them and for what objective.

The test is a request for information and possibility to learn what the teachers didn't know about their students before. The test is important for the students too. The test is supposed to display the students' weak points and strong sides. It's as an indicator of progress the student is gradually making learning the language.

There are four traditional categories or types of tests:

- proficiency tests,
- achievement tests,
- diagnostic tests,
- placement tests.

At first, diagnostic tests. Referring to Longman Dictionary it's a test that is meant to display what the student knows and what he does not know. Moreover, the test can check the students' knowledge before starting a new course.

The diagnostic test displays the teacher a situation of the students' current knowledge. This is very essential especially when the students start some course and the teacher is completely unfamiliar with the level of the group. The teacher should consider about the items he is interested in to teach.

This type of test is very useful for individual check. It means that this test could be applicable for checking a definite item; it is not necessary that it will cover broader topics of the language. However this test is rather difficult to design and the size of the test can be even impractical.

Another type of test we are intended to discuss is a placement test. Concerning Longman Dictionary it's a test that places the students at an appropriate level in a programme or a course. This term does not refer to the system and construction of the test, but to its usage purpose. This type of test is also used to decide which group the learner could be joined to. It's meant for showing the teacher the students' level of the language ability. It will assist to put the student exactly in that group that responds his real abilities.

The placement test typically could be represented in the form of dictations, interviews, grammar tests, etc.

We can compare a placement test and diagnostic one. From the first sight these both types of tests could look similar. They both are given at the beginning of the study year and both are meant for distinguishing the students' level of the current knowledge. However they are different. A diagnostic test is meant for displaying a picture of the students' general knowledge at the beginning of the study year for the teacher to plan further work and design an appropriate syllabus for his students. A placement test is designed and given in order to use the information of the students' knowledge for putting the students into groups according to their level of the language. Indeed, they are both used for teacher's planning of the course their functions differ. The students were divided according to their English language abilities: the students with better knowledge were put together, whereas the weaker students formed their own group. The teachers have explained the students the reason for such actions, why it was necessary – they wanted to produce an appropriate teaching for each student taking his abilities into account. The result proved to be satisfying. The students with better knowledge progressed; no one halted them. The weaker students have gradually improved their knowledge, for they received due attention than it would be in a mixed group.

Next type of tests is a progress test. Progress test will show the teacher whether the students have learnt the recently taught material successfully. Basically, the teacher intends to check certain items. Commonly, it is not very long and is

determined to check the recent material. Therefore, the teacher might expect his learners to get rather high scores. The following type is supposed to be used after the students have learnt either a set of units on a theme or have covered a definite topic of the language. It will display the teacher whether the material has been successfully acquired or the students need additional practice instead of starting a new material.

A progress test will basically display the activities based on the material the teacher is determined to check. To evaluate it the teacher can work out a certain system of points that later will compose a mark. Typically, such tests do not influence the students' final mark at the end of the year.

However, the teachers themselves decide on the necessity of applying them. Nevertheless, we can claim that progress test is inevitable part of the learning process. We can even take a responsibility to declare that progress test facilitate the material acquisition in a way.

Further such type of testing could function as a motivating fact for the learners, for success will develop the students' confidence in their own knowledge and motivate them study further more vigorously.

Apart from a progress test the teachers use another type – achievement test. According to Longman Dictionary an achievement test is a test, which measures a language someone has learned during a specific course, study or program. Here the progress is significant and, therefore, is the main point tested.

Achievement tests are “more formal”, this type of tests will fully involve teachers, for they will be responsible for the preparation of such tests and giving them to the learners.

Compare a progress and achievement test. Again if we look at these two types they might seem similar, however, it is not so. Drawing on the facts we can report that a progress test is typically used during the course to check the acquisition of an excerpted material. An achievement test checks the acquisition of the material, as well. Although, it is far different in its application time. We basically use

an achievement test at the end of the course to check the acquisition of the material covered during the study year, not bits of it as it is with a progress test.

We can differentiate between two kinds of achievement tests: final and progress tests. Final tests are the tests that are usually given at the end of the course in order to check the students' achieved results and whether the objectives set at the beginning have been successfully reached. The tests are based on the curriculum and the course that has been studied.

To conclude we shall state again that achievement tests are meant to check the mastery of the material covered by the learners. They will be great helpers for the teacher's future work and will contribute a lot to the students' progress.

The last type of test to be presented is a proficiency test. Regarding Longman Dictionary proficiency test is a test, which measures how much of a language a person knows or has learnt. It is not bound to any curriculum or syllabus, but is intended to check the learners' language competence. Although, some preparation and administration was done before taking the test, the test's results are what being focused on. The examples of such tests could be TOEFL that is used to measure the learners' general knowledge of English in order to allow them to enter any high educational establishments or to take up a job in the USA. Another proficiency test is Cambridge First Certificate test.

The test could be taken by anyone who is interested in testing the level of language knowledge. There are special tests levels, which can be chosen by a candidate. If a candidate has passed the exam he can take another one of a different level.

We can add that in order to pass these tests a candidate has to attend special preparatory courses.

All four skills are being practised during the preparation course; various reading task and activities have been incorporated; writing has been stressed focusing on all possible types of essays, letters, reviews, etc. Speaking has been practiced as well. The whole material has been consolidated for many times.

To summarize we can claim that there are different types of tests that serve for different purposes. They all are necessary for the teacher's work, for them, apart from a proficiency test, could contribute to successful material acquisition by learners.