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Assessing Quality in BE Training

Nowadays the quality of any learning process can be defined by means of assessment. The procedure itself needs to be operated with criteria for defining quality as well as taking into account the factors, providing favorable conditions for realizing the process under research. The process of learning foreign languages is not the exception in this respect.

The analysis of numerous publications on the problem highlights the connections, which need to be solved, as for students' academic achievements, test control applying, test administration of learners' language proficiency by using specialized computer programs.

However, in the course of numerous publications analysis on the problem under consideration it has been revealed, that general procedure of the above mentioned assessment at each training stage was not the subject of detailed theoretical study so far.

But without working out the above mentioned assessment procedure and providing possibilities to interfere in learning process for its improving, it is impossible to learn effectively as learning itself presupposes co-ordination of actions as well as feedback between those, who teach and learn¹.

Therefore, the purpose of the article is to systematize the learning quality assessment on the example of business English teaching by means of defining

¹ Караєва Т.В. Координація дій студентів при створенні проектів в процесі навчання ділової англійської мови/ Т.В. Караєва // Вісник Дніпропетровського університету економіки та права ім. Альфреда Нобеля. Серія «Педагогіка і психологія». – 2011. 2(2). – С. 65-68.

general scheme for assessment due to keeping to certain steps.

But let us first apply to the definition of “assessment”, which in reference book in wide interpretation is given as “system collecting of information for decision making”², being of uppermost importance for passing from one to another stage or level in learning process.

For providing objective and reliable result it is essential to plan, carry out and register students’ assessment in accordance to the methods used in the models of educational process organization.

Let us consider the model of educational process organization according to the technology proposed by the author of the article for learning Business English that takes into account the learners’ (economic analysts-to-be) level of autonomy. For traditional learning in groups at the Universities these levels are defined as teacher-dependent part (zero autonomy); student-student or teacher-student negotiations (group autonomy); individual/group level (absolute autonomy) in sense of realizing by students themselves their training³.

The model under consideration describes the complete cycle of learning. Not going into details, it should be mentioned that there are so-called “transition points” between the proposed stages in learning process, that need scoring students’ performance in one or another way.

Assessment on entry is preliminary and obligatory stage, which is conducted in order to define the English proficiency level of University entrants. It is the standard diagnostic assessment procedure for defining the relevance of acquired linguistic competence to standard level (say, B1) as well as to diagnose learning gaps to be taken into account and covered by the learning course. It may facilitate to appropriate placement as well by means of testing, which should correspond to adopted regulations. Usually such testing includes tasks of various types (multiple

² Longman Dictionary of language Teaching and Applied Linguistics [author-lexicographer Richards J.C. and others]. – Longman Group UK: Pearson Education Ltd., 2002.

³ Тарнопольский О.Б. Методика обучения языку для делового общения/ О.Б.Тарнопольский, С.П. Кожушко. - К.: Ленвит, 2004.

choice, filling the gaps, substitution, transformation, constructing sentences).

The next stage presupposes implementing the test of educational achievements by students after they mastered lexis and grammar material of thematic and information blocks (TIB) and trained in exercising in order to control their level and pass to another stage. In the given model the mentioned procedure is assumed thrice in each of two semesters over academic year. Each TIB includes tasks for students as well as procedures (set of actions for information processing), that provides realization of the tasks set, being presented by the groups of exercises (preparatory-training and creative appointment).

The level of learning material mastering of the fourth TIB of the given model is verified by testing learners' productive skills in speaking and writing by using the method of expert evaluation⁴ and presentations/reports, having been independently worked out by them within the framework of learning project.

So-called "transition points", being at the same time the "control points" are defined by the instructor, taking into account expediency, and precede passing to the next stage. The types of control are also chosen and planned depending on the aims of studies and the object of control.

Totality of such control points creates the assessing procedure, enabling to make conclusions as for efficiency or inefficiency of the applied model.

Thus, the process of assessing students' achievements is realized at various learning stages corresponding to certain assessment stages, namely:

- *assessment on entry* of entrants to define entry level (linguistic competence) and its conformity to the requirements to university entrants by means of the entry test;
- *formative assessment* of students' educational activity is used to form sub-skills and develop skills they need to fulfill the tasks set in the course

⁴ Мартинова Р.Ю. Цілісна загальна дидактична модель змісту навчання іноземних мов:[Монографія]/ Р.Ю. Мартинова. – К.: Вища шк., 2004.

of the whole learning cycle;

- *periodical assessment* of students' learning activities to define the level of mastering of TIB learning material for passing to another level;
- *summative assessment* of students' learning activities is aimed to verify productive skills (in speaking and writing) already gained by them by using the method of expert evaluations and learning project presenting.

At each of the certain stages it is suggested to apply four basic steps:

Step 1 – defining students' skills and abilities corresponding to the requirements of the training program.

To reveal them it is necessary to follow standard procedure keeping in mind levels given in “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages”⁵; adopted national qualification levels of achievements (educational and professional programs) and “Education and Qualification Descriptors” for specialty training in corresponding branch.

Step 2 – assessment criteria setting.

Assessment criteria depend on the object of control and the stage of training, that is why this stage is mainly focused on speaking and learners' language competences assessing as they include qualitative and quantitative indices of various types (verbal and written). In the proposed model the level productive skills (speaking and writing) was the object of end-of-course assessment, as application efficiency of proposed Business English training technology was the subject of verification⁶. Besides, at this very stage learners' language competences reach the level of already formed productive skills, when they are reflected in the manner of speaking, style and chosen format of writing.

Step 3 - choosing the corresponding assessment method.

⁵ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.- Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. – 2001.

⁶ Караєва Т.В. Кількісна оцінка ефективності методики навчання іноземної мови /Т.В. Караєва// Наука і освіта. Педагогіка і психологія. Випуск 6. – Одеса: Південний науковий центр НАПН України, 2011.

Assessment may be conducted by using one or few methods, presented by a number of variants, that may not be applied in all situations as they differ in their reliability. For getting objective, reliable, agreed and equitable result you need to use a combination of methods.

As an example let us consider methods, having been chosen depending on the assessment goals being used.

For the stage of *assessment on entry* the aim is in assessing the level of linguistic competence for entrants to the university and its conformity to the standard. At this stage it is expedient to apply such methods of assessment as *testing, questionnaires, analysis of results, self-assessment* according to the scale of Common European Framework of Reference.

Formative assessment is done during a course and provides the opportunity for immediate evidence of student learning in a particular module. The following methods as diagnostic tasks should be used, namely - *questioning, practical works, testing, supervision, conversations*.

Periodical assessment presupposes assessing the level TIB learning material mastering by means of introducing such methods as questionnaire filling, giving mini- presentations of project.

Finally, in the course of *summative assessment* for assessing productive skills the following methods are appropriate: *method of expert estimations, presentation of educational product* (to the project) and *discussion*.

Step 4 – assessment conducting.

At this step results of students' learning achievements should be correlated with criteria set at the step 2. If they do not correspond to them, additional training is needed for removing gaps in studies in accordance with instructor's recommendations as well as conducting repetitive assessment.

Thus, assessment theoretical preconditions given in the article by the example of BE learning enable to work out and orderly accomplish certain assessing procedures.

It is expedient to direct further research at detailed working-out of quantitative and qualitative criteria in assessing educational achievements of students.