

Defining the Role of Assessing Strategies to Evaluate Individual Language Differences within ESP Students

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Abstract

The paper focuses to present an unavoidable relation of assessment with evaluation within an ESP course. This relation is principled to visualize a criterion of an ESP learner, who is possessed with different individual language skills. The four language skills, namely; Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are in themselves unique to their essence within individual ESP learner. Therefore, every ESP learner who is taking a course must need to be assessed within these skills in order to qualify the course and become eligible for required demand of job employment. Along with this, there are other necessary factors within an ESP learning like; psychological stability and available resources. These are necessary for successful functioning of learning as well as teaching process within an ESP course. These factors also need to be evaluated for the beneficial outcome of course. Therefore, the significance of assessment and evaluation within an ESP design cannot be denied.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Language skills; Assessment; Evaluation; Individual differences.

1. Introduction:

This paper is a little contribution to demonstrate the vision of assessing individual learner differences, who are taking the course of English for Specific Purposes with a criterion to evaluate their language skills. As, it has been observed that the entire process of study in whole with a learning of any foreign language as a part is really difficult. This is ensured while keeping in view of the enlivened relation to learners with their instructors in a learning process. This might include for a teacher to evaluate the overall learner's personal assessing activities in the form of their ideologies and set traditions. It is because the learners do possess a separate proficiency in skills and a desire for their professional targets. This level of awareness really needs a scholarly investigation that could highlight multi-faceted issues concerning learners taking any particular language course. It is however, still a debated issue for practitioners themselves. Academically, this is largely targeted into the higher educational level concerning the professional requirement. Therefore, the process of assessment and evaluation goes side by side for the learners to help create within themselves the critical mindset of becoming the independent reflective analyzers in serving their professional scheme (Schon, 1983; Falchikov, 2002; Davies, 2006). However, the methods employed in assessing and evaluating of learner's overall progress to generate the positive results is traditional and do not fit for all situations to achieve the desired set goals (Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999). Therefore, it is now a tendency for adopting the alternative form of assessments globally. One of the examples to cite in this regard is of English Language Department for Economic and Mathematical disciplines in Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow Russia.

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Students in this are evaluated within effective time techniques taking ESP course of Business through an assessment procedure based on real life time interactional setting.

1.2. Aim of this Study:

It is to discuss the vitality of regular assessment along with considering individual ESP learner differences that has been a part of common practice in an ESP situation classroom. However, the connection to nurture the ESP learners in building their views and their opinions remains the same. The purpose of realising a practical relation between assessing and evaluating within an ESP learner's performance is towards transmitting their theoretical knowledge for pragmatic professional skills.

1.3. Underlying philosophy of this study:

The strong argument was forwarded by Dudley-Evans and John (1998) with refer to the significant position of assessment and evaluation in overall ESP learning process. Consequently, the importance of assessment and evaluation seems more effective while framing them into realistic vision of designing, practicing and finally for fruitful implementation within specific language skills required in a curriculum. Therefore, the context to define assessment in terms of an academic provision has been referred to a process or an act that is itself meant to gather data about the knowledge by following the attitudes toward it and finally professing the advanced skills within the group of learners to which they are interested in (Kellaghan and Greaney, 2001; Bachman, 2004). Likewise, Sarosdy et al (2006) have stated that the assessment is focusing on language learner's proficiency in terms of their achievement through judging, testing and measuring their individual progresses. Therefore, an assessment and evaluation both are used to claim the individual's description in learning process for desire to reach the required grade in particular course successfully (Bachman and Palmer, 2010). Following this principle, one can proclaim that the particular language course like of an ESP, usually assess the learner's performance during and after taking particular course of an academic field in order to develop communicative competence (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The value of assessment and evaluation in ESP course is rightly identified. But still, there are many underpinnings regarding its authenticity. The utilization of a term *authentic* for assessment and evaluation meant to propagate new dimension in ESP design that is moral reflection of learner's learning process for achieving required language proficiency with positive attitude towards their professional vistas (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). This led to describe briefly about terms that were introduced by (Richardas and Renandya, 2002) stating about varieties of assessments. They are *alternative*, *informal* and *authentic* assessments. These are to assess the ability of ESP learners towards their utilization of language skills for real life situation as an evaluative component in ESP course. The innovative course of assessment is continuous in the form of formative evaluation to assists instructors for finding about learner's previous and current language skills' proficiency level. This later connects to evaluate with future performance of learners towards a systematic path in an academic order. In ESP, the use of terms for *assessment*, *evaluation* and *test* are generally interchanged. They denote the same process of gathering data and following decisions about ESP learners through a thorough observation. Secondly it is headed by self-reporting in layout of tests for improving of learning criteria with knowing to strengths and weaknesses.

1.4. Rationale behind revisiting the scope of this topic:

The justification of this study lies with a conscious purpose of revisiting an awareness to validate the subtle concept of assessment and evaluation within an ESP course. Specifically, it points to language role within an ESP learner's language skills. It further raises the conscious statement about the assessment and evaluation itself. When asked, "*Why assessment and evaluation needs such an in-depth description within an ESP field?*"

The purpose does not end in itself by just defining them only. However, it is more to find the underlying reflective principles that are connecting them with a language course, specifically to an ESP. In this respect, the seven purposes of assessment are defined by (Swearingen, 2002) as, it helps in learner's efficient learning, to know both of personal enhancements alongside with weaknesses, to take definitive stance in selecting a suitable teaching strategy with notion of improving curriculum programs, it eventually flourishes the teaching itself. This all is possible through making of decision by a given data. Lastly, it assists to communicate with COI. Conclusively, it could be presented that the in-depth description of assessment and evaluation lies with gathering, summarizing, interpreting needs of an ESP learner. The only difference that lies between two terms is on level of *action determination*. Assessment provides its direction while, evaluation states its successful rate. The scope of this study narrows down to an individual language skill differences within learners are that are evaluated, taking an ESP course on basis of four levels, assessing their attitudes, learning perceptions, skills and of their effectiveness in a particular field through one type of assessment.

2. Assessing the criteria of individual differences within an evaluative language skills of ESP learners:

Mainly, the learning of a particular language process is bound to acquire competence within four skills. They are, listening, speaking, reading and writing. This demands an essential focus on visualizing the need of assessment and evaluation to properly state individual differences within these four skills, while taking an ESP course. (Godfrey, 2011) have validly argued in this respect, referring to continuous practice of assessment that could assist in putting scrutinized check on attainments of learners. This aims to make a concrete record of assessment profile. This profile will ensure to identify learner's weak as well as strong points that indicate whether an ESP learner can perform an academic assignment for qualifying a procedure towards a certification (Hyland, 2006).

2.1. Listening:

The skill of Listening is concerned with knowing to basic linguistic elements that constitute a concept of learner taking an ESP course related to particular field. This skill ranges from initial structures of phonetics, to the lexis, and finally constituting slots in form of syntax to convey meaningful concepts relating to semantically correct order. This correct order can contribute to fulfil the desired discourse (Buck, 2001). Therefore, considering all levels of listening within a series requires an intelligent combining and functioning of all other skills that situation allows (Pasov, 1977).

2.1.1. General assessing criterion to evaluate individual difference within listening skill of an ESP learner according to previous studies:

The major issue with listening skill is of texts availability. It is having a dilemma compared to reading texts that is without any knowing access (Buck, 2001). Therefore, the lesson deliverance in ESP design course need to have ready-made recordings of lectures in form of CDs or DVDS. However, continuing the same mishap under discussion, (Rost, 1994) claimed about missing of an authentic language within course to be the cause of great hurdle for ESP learners. The language in ESP lectures is of a native English accent. Ready-made recordings are much easier to deliver. However, (Rost, 1994) emphasises for the use of an authentic texts in the recordings that could possess particular lexis, pronunciation and related exercises pertaining to realize the present contextual realization.

2.2. Speaking:

One of the most used and required skill amongst other three skills of routine is speaking skill. Learners usually have fun using it (Nunan, 1991). Many developments have been noticed since the period of last decade within speaking skill to many particular fields, especially ESP. Within, ESP and other fields of study, the studies have recorded innovations within lexis employed in new situations. Proper heed is paid to the dialogues in the form of an individual or group discussions and presentations (Pasov, 1977). It apparently seems easy to develop competency within this skill, however difficult it is in its real sense. (Celce- Murcia and Olshtain, 2000) have rightly put forwarded that the skill of speaking is the most arduous amongst the other skills because it demands orders comprehending while listening and producing speech that could satisfy present situation.

2.2.1. General assessing criterion to evaluate individual difference within speaking skill of an ESP learner according to previous studies:

The assessment of speaking skill to ESP learners could validly be stated that it is designed for evaluating the overall learning abilities of sharing their specific dialogues within dual purposes, on academic and professional levels. One of the criteria that could be marked for evaluating ESP learner differences in speaking is stated by (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996) about the layout of assessing learner's learnt ability for interpreting and forwarding meaningful structures to fulfillment of required and authentic purposes in present communicative context. The assessment sets criteria to follow accuracy and fluency within texts. Therefore, instructors in order to evaluate this skill need the assessment that shall base on activities meant to be authentic for learners in meeting their best within and outside academic settings.

There are many exercises that mainly focus on practice of an authentic language. However, these authentic language exercises are based on module of interdependent lingual methods that required its learning and teaching through integrated order.

It guarantees to establish the realistic version of world scenarios; like for example, order for a direction and receiving, sharing opinions with people, all those crucial tasks that should polish learner's capabilities for the futuristic opportunities based on everyday life situation could be made its theme. The evaluation of speaking skill to ESP learner can be evaluated by involving them into plays like, face-face interviews, fill in the information gap, presenting a situation orally by a report, debates with the assistance for oral report along with conversation classes are experienced to be common in ESP for advanced levels. These are one of the easy and effective ways to flourish fluency within oral skill of learners. (Sárosdy *et al*, 2006) also advocate various examples of speaking skill to develop driving proficiency within examinations that could in the form of reading aloud, dialogue plays, oral interviews etc. In the end, (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996) suggest one suitable way for assessing the oral skill of an ESP learner to evaluate the overall proficient differences amongst them. It was to measure their level at least twice for each quarter or the term. It is meant to be a way forward for recording a profile of learners on continuous basis.

2.3. Reading (An act of interactive processing of Cognition):

To mention reading as a highly interactive process of cognition, could be rightly justified with regard to learner, as an individual time taking and hard process to perceive author, while devoid of any real one-one face interaction (Dominowski, 2002). This is processed with reconstruction of the conveyed thought. (Celce-Mercia and Olshain, 2000) have forwarded their argument as this skill is a way to try for understanding any composed text. Therefore, a reader as a learner of a language (i.e., ESP learner) needs to affirm for strong string that is attached to perform various synchronized acts in order to decipher the conveyed message through identifying scriptures. This will lead to interpret the assigned meaning within sequence of words present (Doff, 1988). This is possible by a reader when s/he constructs the specific knowledge relating to particular field by depending on their previous knowledge.

2.3.1. Call of the previous studies to generally assess a criteria by evaluating differences within individual's reading skill :

Reading assessment demands a keen observance of an order of activities to plan steps in an organized way. (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996) states to initiate an aim of evaluating learner's progress by an option for adapting materials that are not available through skimming and scanning of course in order to diagnose various attitudes of an ESP reader. Therefore, in order to evaluate the reading skill of an ESP learner with a criterion to formulate the individual differences, instructor needs to assess learners with various reading strategies, as well as their comprehension towards taking the test. (Mc Cafferey, 2004) declared that within academics and higher levels of professional academics, the success rate is measured, when learners are schemed to process for employing the higher order thinking practices. Bloom; within his model of taxonomy have marked the higher order stakes of applying, hypothesizing, and analysing (Bloom, 1984). It depends on the situation and requirements of an ESP course, if there is a requirement of lower order stakes then it must be employed within reading process that usually involves group of learners together. Where, some demands another approach of individual thinking towards development that deals with higher order stakes (Biggs, 2003). It merely goes with the instructors that they need to acknowledge themselves with enrolled ESP learners' proficiency by assessing through dual process of analyzing the reading strategies adopted along with way learners usually comprehend a reading text that is served through a proper channel of assessment. ESP learners need to have group discussions that could allow them to re-read the text with conceptual grounding as well as to foster the communicative stance of meaning making. Foremost duty of an ESP instructor lies to gather data of processing the effective reading by observing number of other facts to organize a systematic order of monitoring learner's achievement progress. This could be possible through a continuous assessment of taking at least once or twice a term for keeping an achievement record of an ESP learner. It will ensure an instructional goal by fulfilling the criteria of an ESP teaching course. Further it could be followed up in the end with a proper feedback from adult ESP learners regarding of entire session. With this prospect, ESP learners could become self-analyzers by following the right path of assessing themselves. This process will assist the learners and facilitators to visualize their attitudes with an estimate of positives and loop holes within reading skill. It can result for learners to become independent in reading skill together for taking multiple forms of task in for, of checklists or query/reply series.

2.4. Writing:

Surely, the skill of writing is the production of a language itself. It is sensed by learners to share their eternal thoughts while communicating through a text. Continuing this fact, (Celce-Murcia and Olshain, 2000) have tended to forward their view by presenting the skill of writing as the full-fledged production of any written lexis that could be in

the form of a complete text. However, there is “must-be” criterion that completes form of a text that is readable and understood for vital purposes of communication between reader and writer. It is because of this core principle, one can assume that the skill of writing for an ESP learner could be a challenging task of producing the required pace in many specific circumstances, like of an ESP course. It is because the ESP course desires to have proficient command in specific written text of a particular field subject (e.g., Pasov, 1977, Byrne, 1991). Likewise, this skill is proved amongst the other three of being a long term process towards individualizing thoughts and expressing them. Therefore, the whole layout to share thoughts of people and effectively internalizing varies from person to person. This realization is the subtle fact for ESP learners, who are having different proficiency stages within their writing skills.

2.4.1. Scan of previous contributions to present the assessing criterion of evaluating the differences amongst the ESP learners in their writing skill:

In order to propagate the notion of learning within specific professional field, the skill of writing can be foremost objective of working in both, as with form of result and entire teaching as well as learning process. Assessing of this skill is rationalized for multiple reasons. As a whole, the theme in ESP course design is to inculcate within minds of ESP learners to have general threshold level of competence in writing that shall provide help to other group of learners. For instructors, it is basically a call to engage ESP learners into variety of exercises like summary or letter format paragraphs. This will ensure to formulate for them of evaluating the all-round writing techniques that belongs to a learner professional outlook. In this respect, (Dudley-Evans and John, 1998), have few of the learning exercises; to compose an essay draft on field specific topics, write a report on any situation relating to the specific professional requirement etc. Therefore, the focus that they will pay could be highlighting an authentic writing with relation to provide a realistic scenario for the readers. The example in this regard is of unique “ESP learner based magazines”. (O’Malley and Pierce, 1996) have further notified the ways through which writing skills could be assessed. It is with the facilitator to evaluate amongst different set of learner’s experiences by visualizing them through writing that could base on knowledge with respect to a specific context. However, skill is assessed through a process by which knowledge is organized in a form of content that merely focus onto conventional writing of grammar. The next crucial objective for writing assessment that should hangover the difficulty involved within writing is then facilitated by acknowledging the hidden aspects of writing difficulties amongst the ESP learners. Learners, after following the same assessing pattern by the instructors can personally evaluate another’s writing style by the well-known method of peer assessment that surely includes learners to evaluate the writing of next graded learner. This could help to identify the differences by rating every other aspect of writing skill. However, it should be scheduled by a proper feedback in the end. It is because the assessment of writing is depending on a significant stature to know the learner’s loop holes and strengths. It lies within an order of validating the educational demands to pursue for an effective tool towards positive moral functioning of the ESP learner.

2.5. Evaluation of Extra- lingual factors that equally demands assessment to evaluate criterion of individual experiences within ESP learners based on previous scholarly services:

2.5.1. Learner’s psychological stability:

It is equally significant for instructors to acknowledge the learner’s “comforting zones” that could positively appeal towards psychological stability while taking the entire ESP course. For this to achieve, (Knoop, 2001) have guided few of the underlying considerations of paying equal weightage by decreasing as much possible the torturous issues for the learners who are taking the course. This could on hand mitigate the strains and boredom situation amongst course takers. Thereafter, the balance of known with the unknown factors shall also be handled easily. The assessments to evaluate ESP learner’s overall psychological need could well be diagnosed with the help of context-situated exercises alongside with problem solving tasks that could be moderate within its difficulty level. It shall base on the experience of instructors to identify deep-rooted categories within ESP learners that ranges from those who possess high proficiency level and demands challenging tasks, along with those learners who have low level of competence and feels high level of anxiety to readily cope with bit of a difficult situation. The low-level of proficiency learners could only feel content and enjoy when their course work is made easy. Atmosphere also plays an important role for ESP learners where they could engage themselves with manipulating of meaningful content.

As (Pasov, 1977) shares one of the notable experience by stating that courses of foreign language, like ESP, does possess some of the particular requirements, circumspectly envisioned through climate that shall in a case also promotes the joyous nature of communication within particular set of atmosphere.

2.5.2. No-compromise on quality of promising factors that could assess the individual's progressive achievement within ESP course:

To ensure for guaranteed positive result, there must be the availability of basic resources (George and Weimerskirch, 2002). There is a wide description of resources within an academic context. However, if one could narrow down its scope towards a specific field (Like ESP), then following tools are experienced to be of greater significance. There must be one or two libraries for providing information to the ESP learners from various sources, computer laboratories to practice and assess language skills and others in the form of individual or group discussion. There shall be deliverance of lectures within vacuous halls or rooms. The necessary group of peers, employers and HEIs that should evaluate entire session of ESP course is necessary to provide overall feedback. Therefore, the academic awareness of these requirements is a foremost priority for ESP learners without compromising on its quality management (O'Connell Rust and Helen Freidus, 2001). It is because, foreign language learning like of ESP course is learner-based focusing on job demands for the market standards.

3. Share of Personal opinion:

From the above brief following of valuable works on assessing criterion for ESP learner's individual differences, one can foreword an opinion for evaluating the overall language skills that it is herculean task to mark a set criteria of their evaluation. It is from these academic studies, a path of successful journey could be paved. The journey is not end yet, though it has many steps to cover in future. The studies that have been made a part to discuss for assessing and evaluating the individual differences for ESP learners based on set criteria is technically proving the scenario of western civilization. However, there are various issues on ESP learning that are in Eastern context, where people are learning English as a foreign language for multiple purposes. The eastern culture must not be considered a facsimile to the one in western culture which is opposite to it. Therefore, the criterion of assessing and evaluating language skills of an ESP learner in Eastern zone of the World is quite apart from its opposite zone. However, for the purpose of my Study, review of above sketched studies has validly contributed to find relation of assessment and evaluation within ESP course. They have established the knowledge of assessing the criterion of individual basic language skills for the ESP learners that must be evaluated, following the differences amongst learners taking the specific professional course.

4. Conclusion:

In the following paper, the author has tried to present the relation of assessment and evaluation with an ESP design. It has been made a part of entire discussion that the individual differences are important aspects within ESP learners. They are based on variation in competency as well as required demand of language skills for a professional course. It is entirely with the help of assessing standard criteria within ESP course designs that if they are to be followed by instructors, they can result in knowing the overall proficiency profile of a learner.

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