Assessment affects the quality of learning outcomes in foreign languages

Dr. EMILDA ROSENI
Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education
Aleksander Moisiu University Durres
Dr. MIRANDA ENESI
Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education
Aleksander Moisiu University Durres

Abstract

The debate on choosing the right assessment and testing tools aims to change and improve both teacher assessment techniques and a country's own assessment policies. In Albania, has not been given a proper importance to the student assessment although there is much debate worldwide regarding this issue. In order to bring this vital issue back into the focus of the teaching system, this study on the importance of the professional file for the assessment of students in foreign languages was conducted. Assessing communication skills in a standardized way is much more complex compared to assessing grammatical or lexical correctness. Despite this, many researchers and teaching experts are looking for, finding and designing new ways of assessment. These new ways aim to incorporate communication skills assessment techniques. After all, the ultimate goal of this change remains effective communication, whether this communication in writing and reading or in speaking and listening. Consequently, all language skills need to be carefully and accurately assessed in such a way fot the students to be able to improve these skills in the future. The professional file presents issues and experiences related to the assessment and testing of students foreign language knowledge, reveals the problems encountered by teachers during the process of assessing their students knowledge, reflects the problems encountered by the students themselves during their skills measuring and assessment by teachers and by one another as well as offers recommendations on the

best ways and techniques and the right to test and assess foreign language proficiency in Albanian schools.

Keywords: Assessment, testing, foreign language, student, teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Referring to Krajas (2002), evaluation is the process of measuring performance and progress achieved, highlighting the values of our work, of human and intellectual knowledge or skills from which each of us feels better or worse, not only for the purpose of research of this assessment for school or work effects, but also in order to increase self-esteem, standing among a certain social group and positioning within this group. As such it is quite complex and above all important deserving the most special attention of all of us. Assessment is considered as the most delicate teaching process, as in many cases it is also considered subjective. The challenge of the Albanian school is to draw assessment from the subjectivist contours and to classify it as an element of study and setting in a certain standard, in which foreign experience does not lack. (Pasku, 2012).

It is often noticed that the words testing and essessment are used synonymously, something is not fair at all. Brown (2007) claims that "A test is an instrument of measuring an individual's knowledge or skills in a given field." Tests are specific instruments that are designed with great care and that require a detailed punctuation rubric as well as administrative procedures which occupy a certain period of time in the curriculum. According to Brown, a good teacher never stops assessing his students, whether these asessments are random or intentional.

As Musai acclaims (2002) "The first and most serious risk is when students find that their progress assessment is lower than that of their peers, or lower than a standard set by them. For this they may feel despair and be discouraged". Since arbitrariness is a feature of erroneous assessment practice, then recognizing and eliminating this factor remains essential.

BODY OF MANUSCRIPT

Purpose of the paper: professional file will serve primarily the teaching practice, to get better acquainted with the role and methodology of assessment and testing in 9-year schools, finding ways to avoid problems that arise during student assessment. As a result, this paper will serve both foreign language teachers and students studying to graduate as prospective foreign language teachers.

TABLE FIGURES AND EQUATIONS

### Analysis of questionnaires addressed to students

To observe the weaknesses in the assessment process in the Ali Demi school in the city of Tirana, a questionnaire was conducted with the students of this school. The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess the information that students have about their assessment policies. The questionnaire was distributed to about 100 students from 3rd to 9th grade. The questionnaire was completed and delivered in classroom.

To the first question,' Do you have information about the incentives that talented students receive?', students answered you as follows: about 50% of them had information, 30% had some information about this question and about 20% had no information at all.

From the graph below it is noticed that most of the students about 60% answered that they would like to be assessed with moral values and about 40% with material ones.
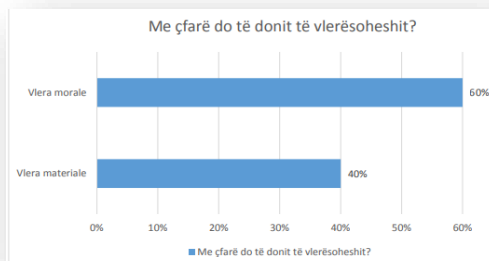
To the third question whether students are informed about the implementation of assessment policies about 60% answered that thye did not know anything about it.
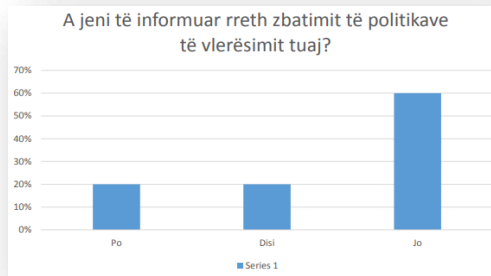
The results obtained from the survey regarding the transparency of student assessment show that 30% of them claim to have a conflict with the teacher regarding the way of assessment, 50% of them have some conflict and 20% have no conflict at all.

In question no.5 it is noticed that in 60% of cases the reason for their conflicts with teachers is the unfair assessment made by teachers, who are too demanding and do not fairly assess their students knowledge. While a disturbing percentage of students surveyed about 30% of them say that the reason for their conflicts with teachers are the offensive words that teachers use against them. This is a very disturbing phenomenon because it shows that the teachers of our schools are not trained enough to know how to behave with the pupils character. 10% of students surveyed expressed that the reason for their conflicts with teachers is unfair favoritism that teachers do to other students, according to the acquaintances and friendships that teachers have with the parents or relatives of these students.

One of the strengths of Ali Demi School in terms of student assessment policies is that students are given space to assess each other at the end of the class. The tests are also a strong point because

they are designed according to the standard and objectives of certain subjects and students come out well and satisfied with the assessment as this is reflected in their test sheets. One of the other achievements is the student portfolio. Thus students keep personal files in the foreign language subject. They are given assignments due to topics and at the end of the semester the portfolio is assessed. Projects put students to work and stimulate them to present a dignified work. They are satisfied with the assessments and by comparing the files with one another they manage to self-assess. The 9-year school "Ali Demi" has a good cooperation with the community and is considered to be an open school that has constant communication with both parents and other groups. For the last four years there has been no case of students dropping out of school. Meanwhile it is estimated that teaching techniques are contemporary and this is also shown by the increasing number of applications to enroll in this school. Freedom of thought, creation, expression is the best way to achieve goals even in scientific terms. In this regard, "Ali Demi" school uses the new curricular structure approved by MESY. The programs and their implementation is in accordance with all instructions of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. To ensure a more objective assessment, the teacher at Ali Demi School follows this scheme:

The criterion	Points
Quality, development and organization of the essay idea	1-5 points
Style, vocabulary used, individuality	1-3 points
Sentence structure	1-3 points
Punctuation structure	1-2 points
Spelling	1-2 points

PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment is primarily about students learning, to encourage them to learn more. - Assessment serves to encourage the student to learn and give the student instructions on how to learn in order to improve learning outcomes and beyond. Assessment does not only serve to prove how much the student has achieved.

2. Assessment provides complete information about student achievement. - Assessment also provides information about what students know and what they can do with what they know.; - By emaeans of assessment students' knowledge and skills are evaluated,

as well as their values, attitudes and habits, which affect both success in school and out-of-school achievement.; - Assessment also provides information on students 'strengths and weaknesses, which is then used to ensure students' progress in learning.

3. Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. - There is a clear link between learning goals and content and assessment. - Teaching, learning and assessment are intertwined processes and ensure coherence in learning.- What will be evaluated depends on the learning goals and contents. It depends on the result of assessment how the lesson will be developed and towards what goals it aims to move.;- The student has an active role in the assessment process.

4. Evaluation is based on the use of more different methods. - Using more different methods makes it possible to reduce the weaknesses and limitations of each method separately.;- When more than one method is used, assessment takes into account students' different learning styles.

5. Evaluation is an ongoing process. - During assessment, the progress of the students' achievements is checked based on how the students are oriented towards the goals set in the lesson.

6. Assessment is fair. - Fair evaluation refers to impartiality in the implementation of assessment, in the assessment of achievements and in the interpretation and use of results. - Assessment does not favor students on the basis of background, gender, or based on their previous experiences with teachers and / or the assessment method.

7. Assessment is transparent. - Students know what the learning goals are, what standards they are expected to achieve, and how students' achievement will be assessed (what they need to learn, and when they will be assessed).

- Students and parents have access to assessment (in the methods to be used and in the results of their use).

8. The evaluation is valid and reliable

- Evaluation provides information that is relevant to the purposes and contents of the assessment.

- The interpretation of the evaluation results does not include judgments about the behavior, abilities and skills of students, which are not subject to concrete assessment.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT - SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
Evaluation has advantages:	Evaluation has several disadvantages
1. Helps the student to progress in his formation	1. Evaluation errors are judgment errors that one person systematically makes when assessing another one.
2. To assess the knowledge and to make it sufficient for the student to continue his education	2. The more aware you are of the mistakes the greater the chance of correcting them, but correcting is a very complicated process.
3. To ensure a fair use of student assessment and a quality school system	3. Among the main evaluation errors we mention:
	a-The effect of contrast
	b- First impression
	c- Central error
	d- Extreme error
Opportunities	*Assessment risks*
1. Assessment should be an integral part of the school development plan and the school's annual plan.	There are teachers who assess according to certain criteria, which are simply their own and do not take into account the objectives of the subject program. As a result, it happens that, with different teachers, the same grade belongs to students with very different knowledge and skills. Each evaluation is based on the objectives of the program. This means that each exam, written or oral, or with practical demonstration, is intended to measure how well a certain objective has been met or how many objectives have been met.
- Each school should have a written school-level assessment policy (i.e., to cover both Student Assessment (Summative Assessment), Learning Assessment (Formative Assessment), and the Code of Ethics for Assessment.	
- School evaluation policy should be in line with the Curriculum Framework, principles and standards set by the MESY for school-level evaluation.	The objectives of the program are the main element of the whole teacher evaluation activity.
- The assessment policy should include: a selection of assessment methods as well as the development of instruments; conducting assessments; classification; and providing information derived from the findings of the assessment process, with results disaggregated also on a gender basis.	There are teachers who give students very difficult requirements. The student text does not have these requirements, but they are usually found in early editions, perhaps from the time they were students or even in new specialized editions for rare students.
- Each school should regularly monitor its assessment capacity and practices in order to lead to an action plan to strengthen assessment in line with school policy.	This outdated tendency is encountered a lot and hurts the students so much that they are discouraged, their will fades and their subject becomes difficult..

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

The subject teacher and the school must select and implement a sufficient number of instruments for measurement and assessment, such as:

- observation;
- the questionnaire (self-assessment);
- written report of an practical work or research;

• oral expression;

• written expression;

• the checklist (used for student maneuvering skills);

• file or portfolio (self-assessment);

• test based on criteria and objectives;

• achievement test built by demand (question):

• with multiple alternative responses;

• with short open answers;

• with extended open answers etc. and any other instrument that the teacher deems necessary.

The most used types of assessment

<u>Diagnostic assessment</u>: through this assessment learning difficulties or problems related to learning are identified. Also through assessment diagnosticians identify weaknesses and strengths of teaching, the various causes of learning problems, etc. are determined, in order to take measures for its improvement and advancement and for the formulation of an action plan to help students (Pasku, 2012).

<u>Formative assessment</u>: through this assessment we aim to identify mistakes, shortcomings and difficulties in working with students, in order to help them. Formative assessment monitors the progress, process, progress of students, teachers, provides feedback to bring improvements. Controls the progress of students' learning during the learning process, i.e controls the degree of mastery of instructional objectives.

<u>Summative assessment</u>: determines the achievements at the end of the school year, at the end of the curriculum. It serves to make decisions for students, teachers, programs, etc. Aims to grade and certify students, also provides information to judge the acquisition of subject objectives and the effectiveness of the curriculum.

<u>Self-Assessment</u>: is a process during which the institution, school, teacher, student gather information about themselves and make a judgment of their values. The student realizes this assessment by comparing his / her results with the achievement standards. Through self-assessment students have the opportunity to assess themselves, their achievements in relation to certain learning goals. Self-assessment based on fair criteria creates the basis for further

motivation, improvement and student learning assessment (QTKA, 2003).

Whichever method teachers choose to use, they should reflect with their students on the work done, develop students' ability to critically see their own progress as well as the progress of other students in the classroom. It is essential to note that the portfolio is not in itself the tool that brings development and progress, but the ways and means that students and teachers use it in the classroom bring a critical analysis of the work done and the achievement of the goals and objectives set by both parties (Brown, 2007).

TRADITIONAL EVALUATION / ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION

Analyzing traditional and alternative assessment requires a lot of time and physical space, but really a comparison of these two large assessment groups is in fact, as will be reflected further, a reflection of major changes in the education system itself and mainly in the methods used in teaching the Albanian language. Unfortunately, even today, in our schools the notion of "assessment" carries in itself a vision of tests, exams or a long list of grades. All of these are considered very important and are generally thought to measure student achievement objectively, accurately and reliably. "Exams are one of the forms of final control of pupil s' knowledge that take place at the end of the school year. They aim to identify the real state of the level of knowledge, for each student, to determine the degree of preparation to continue in a higher school category or to to settle down at work" (Didaktika, 1986).

This system has many advantages in terms of ease of administration, it manages to easily compare individuals (rate-based rating) and everyone knows that a grade 9 is better than a grade 7. In this way it provides an efficient way "classification of those who stay on top, in the middle or end, directing them toward a certain position in society" (Moon & Mayes, 1995).

But how realistic is this assessment and this grade? Has the grading been done honestly and fairly? Would another teacher, or the same teacher but on a different day, make the same assessment for the same exam? Should the purpose of assessment be the selection and ranking of students or should assessment play an educational and constructive role? The answers to these questions and many others similar to these, during these last 3 decades in the world and this last

decade in Albania, have brought dramatic changes in the way of the assessment perception and its application in practice. Traditional tests differ from alternative assessment in that "students are assessed on what they integrate and produce more than on what they are able to remember and reproduce." (Huerta-Macias, 1995). Alternative assessment is a new trend in the Albanian learning environment. More and more in these environments is being talked about portfolios, diaries, conferences, observations, etc. and the interest of both students and teachers in these alternatives is increasing. The main reason for this interest is due to the fact that these types of assessments differ fundamentally from traditional assessment and many of them even motivate students' work and progress in their learning.

CONCLUSIONS

In the 9-year school Ali Demi, in the city of Tirana, one of the problems encountered during the assessment of pupils is the Assessment of essays in foreign languages, mainly of the 9th grade. Pupils at this point also have more dissatisfaction as they feel that they have not been treated the same as other pupils, or have not received the proper points. At the time of evaluating an essay the teacher should design a response model. It is also better to asses the essay without reading the student's name and to be careful if he/she is applying the same assessment criteria to everyone.

Another weak point is the dictation in the elementary school where very little space is left to the dictation rubric. Thus, space is not enough for pupils as they have many problems with spelling in foreign languages. Another problem is the homework assessment, as tasks can be accomplished but do not have the proper presentation or content and in most cases are accomplished by the eldest.

Another weakness of assessment is oral assessment. The greatest dissatisfaction of students appears in oral work. Thus oral assessment does not have a standard and students are not aware of how they are assessed. For this reason we often hear why this grade or the other. Thus the need arises to create a standard for oral assessment and this to be presented to pupils. Also a way to create transparency in assessment is by placing pupils in the role of the teacher and giving them the freedom to assess one another.

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