



ASSESSING THE OLD GUARD: ANALYZING COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION METHODS IN AN ELT CLASSROOM.

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Abstract

Examinations are considered crucial and sacrosanct tools for assessment and evaluation. Today many old assessment methods of evaluation are replaced by continuous and comprehensive evaluation modes. The paper 'Assessing the Old Guard' analyses the age-old method of examination which comes with its own pros and cons. The present paper aims at understanding the age-old method of evaluation which was believed to be a litmus test to test the learning outcomes of the learner. Discussing the methods of comprehensive evaluation, the paper illustrates the diverse methods of assessment in an ELT classroom and states the relevance of comprehensive evaluation in assessing the learner's language proficiency skills in an ELT classroom. The paper also discusses the different types of objective tests which are useful in measuring achievements for the learners and how it plays an important role in assessing the comprehension and interest of the learners.

Keywords

Evaluation, Assessment, Continuous, Comprehensive, Cramming, Rote Memorization, ELT.

Full Paper

The word 'examination' has its origin from the Latin word 'examen' (examine) which means the tongue or pointer of a balance. The tongue in a balance is indicated by its movement and gives a comparison of the weights in the two pans of a balance. The system of examinations began with this view i.e., weighing the achievements of the learner against a standard weight. 'Test' also has its origin from 'Testum' the Latin term which means an earthen pot which was used for testing gold.

Examinations normally are conducted at the end of the teaching programme. The method of examination in the olden days was a comprehensive evaluation process which lasted for two to three hours. This turned out to be a tiresome and strenuous process for the assesses as well as the assessors. They represent and test the old and traditional notions of the subject, rather than assessing the critical thinking and logical abilities of the learners. Moreover, examinations test only imaginary qualities and attainments. It gives credit and discredit only for the performance and is not concerned with any further understanding of the matter reproduced during examination. It also accounts to cramming of the subject matter to a level of rote memorization with least understanding, interest, and imagination. Examination centered teaching has no utility in life, as its utility is limited only to scoring a good grade in the examination. The crammed material is soon forgotten and is never applied to the practical aspects of life. Examination uses dogmatic tools to measure attainments and subjectivity pervades the whole procedure of examination, leaving many things to chance, luck and mood of the persons involved. Examinations demand long essay type answers in response to questions which are generally vague and confusing. As exams come only at the end of the term, it is more cumbersome, terrorizing and nerve breaking. In addition to all these, examinations do not cover the entire portions. Only selected topics are touched, and the rest were left neglected. Hence some parts of the teaching materials are given undue importance by the examiners while the others went unnoticed. In the examination procedures, the examiner's reliability is also generally negligible. There is a wide variation in the valuation process by the same examiner and by different examiners, even though they might all be following the same answer scheme. This leads to a lack of uniformity in the entire examination process.

Most often comprehensive examination processes are mere speed tests. The lack of innovative thinking in question papers makes the answers a long trail of memorized passages which are strewn all over with no sense of comprehension. The set stock questions dull the creativity of the students. Students who score high grades for examination fail when they need to express, communicate and prove their competence.

Examinations are an important part of teaching, yet the examination system prevalent in our educational system is defective and needs to be revamped. In the comprehensive method of evaluation, minimum effort and thought process happens while preparing the question paper or the question bank. It is most often a hit and miss affair, in which the sampling and learning tasks are relatively inadequate. The scoring patterns are also highly subjective and is influenced by largely by the quality of handwriting, the presence of phrases and references which the examiner recognizes as familiar. Also, the marking procedure in different universities and schools cannot be compared on a level playing ground. Another aspect to be noted is that there is no vital relationship between instruction and examination. Examination cannot influence instruction. Consequently, the appropriateness of instruction is not evaluated.

'Evaluation' has been long replaced by the term 'examination.' Evaluation is generally concerned with the testing of scholastic achievements of pupils of age or grade. Evaluation goes much beyond the ends of examination, and it seeks to measure the all-round progress of the pupils in order of the objectives decided by the teacher at the very beginning of the teaching programme. A programme of evaluation is also directed towards the future progress of the pupils, as it attempts to diagnose the causes of their failures in attaining the objectives

and providing valuable hints for further improvement in teaching procedures. Evaluation based on teaching is of greater utility. The knowledge acquired is readily applied and made more useful. For evaluation, new scientific up to date techniques of measurement are used. Its emphasis is on objectivity based on the questions, knowledge covered procedure of administration and marking.

The essay type questions can give the best evidence of the development of an ‘ability to express in continuous and sustained prose and organized written expression.’ Since the existing system of essay type tests has failed to fulfil the real objective, another method of examination has been developed which focuses on more objective based questions. The Objective tests seek to measure more consistency and accurately the knowledge of terms, concepts, vocabulary, facts and understanding and measure only what is intended to be measured. The objective type could be conducted in the form of Recall tests, Completion tests, Alternate Response tests, Matching tests, or Multiple-Choice Tests.

The present semester system of examination advocates both internal and external examinations and assessments, as there was a general disagreement that the distortions faced by the comprehensive examination was with an over emphasis on the external examination. With the growing number of enrollments to schools and universities, teaching, learning and evaluation processes have become complex and impersonal. Focus should be more on monthly, weekly and unit tests which should focus on the comprehension of the content rather than cramming or memorizing large amounts of data. The performance of students should be monitored on a weekly basis or periodic basis and in an overall assessment this should be taken into consideration. Radhakrishnan Commission, Kothari Commission, and the New Education Policy, focused on these similar aspects.

Internal and external evaluation should be given equal consideration, and this should be considered to evaluate the achievement of the learners. Questions should focus on the critical ability, reasoning, and creative thinking of the students rather than on memorizing lengthy and insignificant data. Diagnostic tests and remedial teaching should focus on understanding the challenges faced by the learner, rather than as a mode to identify and categorize the learner’s disabilities. Internal assessments should also be brief, continuous, and valid. External examinations should ideally be conducted once, at the end of each semester/year. Questions for the end semester/ yearly examinations should be proportionately placed as objective and essay type questions. The result of a learner should indicate due consideration and weightage to the performance of the candidate in internal and external examinations. Thus, internal and external examinations should be used effectively as judicious tools to evaluate the learner’s achievements.

In an ELT (English Language teaching) classroom, if we consider ‘communication’ to be the goal, then most of the tests and assessments should be geared towards that outlook. Graduates passing out of a university should be good in LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) skills combined with good etiquette and soft skills. Students must be well groomed and prepared to attend and face interviews, group discussions, draft letters, and reports. Questions like ‘Write a critical appreciation of *Ode to a Nightingale* or Sketch the character of *Julius Caesar* will not enable or prepare them for a career. If our tests are designed to be more down to earth

and practical, our students will appreciate their relevance in real life. This might in turn motivate them to be more attentive in classrooms.

While preparing for an assessment, the tutor must endeavour to cover all the main objectives of teaching providing a fair sample of the pupil's attainments. Examinations provide an opportunity for carefully assessing and analyzing the common errors in the classroom. Examinations should be valid and reliable, i.e., it should be tested, and the results should be objective, consistent and accurate as far as possible. There are also different types of objective tests which are useful in measuring achievements for the learners. These play an important role in assessing the comprehension and interest of the learners.

Examinations in an ELT classrooms should consist of Oral tests including reading and comprehension tests and Written tests should focus on language skills such as sentence patterns and grammatical accuracy, rather than the use of colloquialisms. Focus should be more to understand the ability of comprehension of learners based on podcasts and interviews. Movie and book reviews are also excellent methods to understand the critical thinking and analytic skills of the learners. Just a minute discussion, Speeches, debates, Ted talks and group discussions should be initiated in classrooms to encourage flow of ideas and to instill speaking skills in learners. Examinations should focus on the command of English language and in countries where English is studied as a second or foreign language, focus should be more on pronunciation and speaking skills with emphasis on Standard English. Students should strive for good pronunciation free of mother tongue interference (MTI) free of inflections, jargons, and slang.

Examinations in an ELT classroom is a means to evaluate and assess the progress of the learners and reveal their strengths and weaknesses. This helps the teacher to explore the cause and remedial means to handle every learner. Understanding the potential of the learners helps the teacher to determine the effectiveness of instruction and whether the facilitators must alter or improve their methods of teaching. Moreover, examinations also serve as a tool for the teacher to understand the overall comprehension and level of understanding in a classroom and to take preventive and curative measures accordingly.

The paper also aims to assess the comprehensive examination strategies and how it helps to evaluate the learner's language proficiency skills in an ELT classroom. Integrated Skill assessments can help to evaluate the proficiency of learners and how they use language appropriately in real life situations. Project assessment methods can also be incorporated to evaluate the effectiveness of LSRW skills in an ELT classroom. To assess speaking skills and practical usage of language among learners, oral interviews and debates can be incorporated as a mode of assessment. Writing skills can be assessed with comprehensive written examinations such as short stories, essays and narratives which can evaluate specific skills such as writing, critical thinking and creative writing abilities among learners. In an ELT classroom, peer assessments can enhance collaborative learning practices and it also provides fresh and diverse perspectives from varied sources. The table stated below mentions the different types of comprehensive assessments which can be done in an ELT classroom.

Serial no.	Assessments and its diverse variations	Frequency	Type/ Purpose of Assessment
1	Semester End Examination / Year End Examination	Comprehensive	End of the Semester/ Year
2	Mid Term Examination	Periodic	Mid of the semester/ covering half of the entire modules
3	Standardized Tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ TOEFL-<i>Test of English as a Foreign Language</i> ➤ IELTS-<i>International English language Testing System</i> ➤ SAT-<i>Scholastic Assessment Test</i> 	Periodic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Skill Assessment exams for specific Programs/ Courses ➤ To check Language Proficiency Tests at a Beginner, Medium and Advanced levels.
4	Integrated Skill Assessments-LSRW, Soft Skills	Periodic	To check language proficiency and its improvement periodically
5	Portfolio	Periodic/ Yearly/ for university entrance assessments.	Demonstrates the learner's writing, critical thinking and organizing skills.
6	Projects	Yearly/ End of the Term or semester	To check the overall comprehension, knowledge of subject matter, critical thinking, and logical ability.
7	Interviews/ Simulations/ Role Plays	Periodic	To assess subject knowledge, logical ability and to check speaking and listening skills.
8	Oral Assessments	Periodic/ Interviews/ Yearly assessments.	To check listening comprehension ability,

			conciseness and speaking skills.
9	Language Assessments	Periodic/ Yearly	To check grammatical conciseness and preciseness.
10	Peer Assessments/ Self-Assessment	Periodic/ Yearly	To check within one's own peers and assessing by self.

ELT tests should also be conducted on a periodic basis with standardized testing procedures based on rubrics, as it helps to reduce transparency in evaluation. Summative assessment helps to evaluate overall language proficiency in the learners. In a continuous evaluation process, assignments can be given to assess communication skills among learners. Tests can be sorted and continuously evaluated in the following forms:

Skills to be evaluated	Types of Assessment
1. Listening	Role Plays, Simulations, Storytelling, Analyzing Podcasts, and lectures
2. Speaking	Debates, Classroom discussions, JAM.
3. Reading	Reading journals, Summative articles, Case Studies, Books, Comprehension passages.
4. Writing	Written assignments, Composition, Essays and Creative Writing passages,
5. Soft skills	Interviews, Public Speaking, Presentation

Varied assignments can be used to assess different levels of learners who come from different social and cultural backgrounds. In the case of comprehensive assessment, periodic assessments can be incorporated to check the attainment of learning objectives and outcomes. Also, while conducting the examination. It is imperative that the course covers all the aspects of language acquisition such as LSRW, vocabulary and grammar in a balanced manner.

Comprehensive assessments should be valid and reliable, i.e., the assessor should verify that the tests are measuring what it is intended to measure, hence checking the validity, and ensuring the reliability by ensuring that the tests are consistent in assessing the learner's skills over a long period of time. When the tests are based on real life situations, the learners will find the assessments to be relatable and beneficial. In an ELT classroom, assessments should incorporate a variety of tasks to assess the language skills of the learners such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Instructions should be clearly stated, and the grading criteria should be clearly defined with a blueprint of the question paper with the answer key before the assessment. This helps to ensure that questions from all the modules or domains have been covered. The assessment should also ensure a proper feedback mechanism to ensure that the exam is adaptable and flexible to accommodate different and diverse learning styles, cultures, and preferences. Comprehensive assessments today can also be done with the help of AI tools and multimedia devices to motivate the learners and to understand their diverse and creative

writing abilities. Finally comprehensive assessments should also ensure to check the outcomes of learning through Diagnostic tests and further through remediation classes or Remedial learning modules.

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