

BETTERMENT THROUGH ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN ENGINEERING GRADUATES

D.Pavana Kumari¹, Kommuru. Dasaradhi², G.Srinath³

¹Assistant Professor, Balaji Institute of Technology & Science, Narsampet, WARANGAL, Telangana

²Research Scholar, RTM Nagpur University, NAGPUR

³M.Sc(Psy), M.A(Eng), B.Ed, P.G.D.H.R.M, Vice President, P.P.A, Krishna Dt.

ABSTRACT

Alternative assessment is a form of student performance grading that allows for a more holistic approach for student assessment over the traditional form. With this kind of assessment, students are enabled to provide their own responses rather than simply selecting from a given list of options. The session delved upon best practices and innovative ways of assessments in classrooms. In many ways, by providing courses, collaborating on new curriculum, validating programmes, and sharing expertise to help other distance learning ventures become established. The focus for all our collaborative ventures is on finding new ways to fulfil our mission of opening up educational opportunities to more people at more places.

Keywords: Curriculum, Engineering Graduates, Alternative Assessment, Employability

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent NER report says that 76% of engineering graduates lack English speaking and comprehension skills. Various ELT methodologies have been evolved and implemented in the past 5 decades in India to no avail. This is a growing concern among the language teaching fraternity. This paper proposes the use of Leo van Lier's concept of Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity (AAA), and Alternative Assessment (AA) as a teaching and testing method in a language class. This combination can prove to be useful in providing opportunities for the teachers to recognize the students' specific needs in language learning and for the students to understand their language proficiency, which they had taken for granted until their school level.

There is a growing concern among the employers and the educationists that a majority of the engineering graduates are turning out to be unemployable. As the NER report says, about 76% of those graduates lack English speaking and comprehension skills. This has certainly put the language teachers of the engineering colleges in a tight corner. Many teachers would blame the school curriculum and the attitude of the students towards language learning for the poor performance in English. Though all these are true, some action needs to be taken to promote learning English by kindling the interest of the students. To do this, Alternative Assessment and Leo Van Lier's AAA and could be useful.

II. ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Most of the students are scared of examinations. When they realize that anything that they write or say is being assessed, anxiety sets in. Their performance doesn't reflect their true capability or knowledge. Some students prepare only before the exam and somehow score better marks. Some students, though they are knowledgeable, lose their marks due to test anxiety. Both situations mentioned above do not portray the true picture of a students' language proficiency. The students believe that their marks are reflective of their real capability, thus leading to inferiority complex or indifference towards learning the subject. This situation can be alleviated by bringing in alternative assessment in the classrooms.

Instead of treating assessments as an end process, it could be used as a formative tool and can be used for giving a clear picture of the students' language proficiency. Any test that is not traditional is an alternative assessment. Through alternative assessment we assess the students' strength and weakness in learning any concept/subject, here, it would be acquiring English language skills. Once the teacher identifies the strength and weakness of the student, teaching and testing is based on strengthening the weakness by using the existing strong points. This provides scaffolding for the students to learn in a better way, as they are now aware of their shortcomings.

Alternative assessment is formative in nature, learner-centric, performance based and criterion-referenced. It involves students in the teaching-learning-testing process, thus ensuring sharing of responsibility by both students and teacher. In alternative assessment, tests are given not as an end result. It is used for giving feedback to both teachers and students about their performance. The scores are not ultimate; hence students need not worry about failing or exceeding others' marks. The alternative assessments are performance based, so the students can weigh their performance against their own previous performances. This could give them an idea about their learning process and proficiency.

Leo van Lier's AAA

Leo van Lier (1996) talks about the three principles of language curriculum: awareness, autonomy and authenticity.

III. AWARENESS

To know or learn something, one must notice it. In language learning, the awareness of learning strategies and processes help in acquiring the skill. Students should be made aware of their strengths and weaknesses in using English language by giving feedback about their performances in classroom activities, assignments, group work or class tests (formative). This feedback should be based on the rubrics formulated by the teacher, which the students can refer to while preparing for their assignments or assessments. When a student is made aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they understand that they are not totally incapable of learning, because they know something (strength) and that they have not completely mastered the language, as there are some weaknesses too. Now the students will pay attention in the class as they know their score in English language at school level is not their real proficiency, hence there are learning points in the class. This awareness now paves way for learning with interest, thus changing their attitude towards English language learning.

IV. AUTONOMY

Learning cannot happen by force. It is the students' choice to learn anything they want to learn. The two features mentioned in this are: choice and responsibility. Learning takes place when the learner is interested in learning and plays an active role by owning responsibility for his/her learning. The awareness of strength and weakness will guide the students to learning. This learning cannot be made the same for all the students. The curriculum and the syllabus ensure uniform teaching of units/lessons for all students irrespective of their heterogeneous nature. But with AAA, these topics could be dealt with differently for students according to their learning capability. For a writing task, if a student is found weak in grammar, he/she could be taught the grammatical item and the context in which it could be used in writing; if a student has good command over language, but lacks content to write an essay, the methods to brainstorm ideas could be taught to him. Thus all the students can arrive at the final result of writing an essay, but catering to different learning needs. This autonomy has to be given to students to choose what they need to learn according to their awareness of strength and weakness.

V. AUTHENTICITY

Generally, authenticity means the materials used for language learning is taken from a wider context and is not restricted to the prescribed texts. Here this term refers to "a free choice and is an expression of what a person genuinely feels and believes." The learner is self motivated to learn and does not do it because everybody does it. Due the awareness created in the students' minds regarding their needs in learning English, the students are self motivated to learn. The teachers' problem of dealing with inattentive or lackadaisical students is sorted out as the learners' motivation is authentic.

VI. IDEOCENTRIC FIELD

These three are connected in the ideocentric field and at the intrapersonal level leading to achievement in learning.

Combining AAA and AA

The combination of Alternative Assessment and Leo van Lier's AAA can be used to change the attitude of the students. The implementation of this can be done in the following ways:

Alternative assessments are used to determine what students can and cannot do, in contrast to what they do or do not know.

Alternative assessments, also referred to as performance tests or authentic assessments, are used to determine what students can and cannot do, in contrast to what they do or do not know. In other words, an alternative assessment measures applied proficiency more than it measures knowledge. Typical examples of alternative assessments include portfolios, project work, and other activities requiring some type of rubric.

The essence of a performance assessment is that students are given the opportunity to do one or more of the following:

- Demonstrate their ability
- Perform a meaningful task
- Receive feedback by a qualified person in terms of relevant and defensible criteria

In short, the purpose for using alternative assessments is to assess students' proficiency in performing complex tasks that are directly associated with learning outcomes.

VII. ADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

- They provide a means of assessing valued skills that cannot be directly assessed with traditional tests.
- They provide a more realistic setting for student performance than traditional tests.
- They focus on student performance and the quality of work performed by students.
- They can be easily aligned with established learning outcomes.
- Process can be costly in terms of time, effort, equipment, materials, facilities, or funds.

VIII. DISADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

- Process can be costly in terms of time, effort, equipment, materials, facilities, or funds.
- Rating process is sometimes more subjective than traditional exams.

IX. GUIDELINES FOR CONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

1. Define the instructional outcome you want to assess as clearly and unambiguously as possible in terms of both the subject-matter content and the set of skills or operations that a skillful performer would exhibit.
2. Example: Students will perform five types of Cha Cha steps in correct dance position without error.
3. Distinguish between those outcomes that can validly be assessed solely by performance assessments and those that can be assessed just as effectively by objective measures.
4. Students would have a difficult time demonstrating dance steps on paper.
5. Create tasks that elicit evidence of the student's ability to perform the targeted skill.
6. Task: Set aside a block of classroom time for students to dance with a partner, two or three couples at a time. Allow students to dance for at least 2 minutes so they have time to demonstrate all the steps they know. Students should have sufficient time to practice the steps before they are assessed.
7. Decide what kinds of teacher guidance can be used while still allowing students the freedom to learn and do it their own way. Students may do the steps in whatever order they would like. Teacher may put the names of the different steps on the board to help students remember them if needed.
8. Try out the assessment and make revisions as necessary. Revisions could include giving more detailed instructions and expectations to the students or inviting an assistant to write down dictated comments while the teacher keeps his or her attention on the dancers.

X. OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

Achieving the combination of AAA and AA is not quite easy, as it requires more effort from teachers. Ensuring the principles of testing – reliability, validity and authenticity, is important, otherwise the test would be considered invalid. So preparing a task or assignment should be done keeping in mind the principles of testing. Rubrics should be prepared and discussed with the students. Evaluating a task should be made transparent by

providing the rubrics and most importantly, following the rubrics while evaluating a paper or speaking activity. The students could be given the taste of using the rubrics by asking them to self evaluate and peer-evaluate the tasks. This would give them the experience of looking at the use of language from the teachers' perspective. This experience helps them in moulding their use of language in academic and professional context.

IX. CONCLUSION

Theoretically, everything can be done perfectly well. But as practicing teachers, the teaching fraternity knows that there are more hindrances in ways of implementing Alternative assessment in regular large classes that we find in our Indian colleges/universities. But it is possible when changes are made at the policy level to bring in reforms in the curricula and when teachers are given liberty to teach to the students for their benefit and not for the sake of completing the syllabi and preparing them for taking up the exams. Teaching should be done with the sole purpose of educating the students what they do not know and what they ought to know. Leo van Lier's AAA and alternative assessment could prove to be useful in orienting both the teachers and students in the right direction in language acquisition.

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