

TESTING AND EVALUATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING – A CASE OF O LEVEL ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *One of the ways through which feedback can be obtained from the learners on what the teachers had taught them is evaluation. Students' achievement in a particular course of study can be determined through evaluation. This work observed various aspects of Ordinary Level English in which students' achievement are often assessed in Nigeria with a view to assisting students in overcoming problems often encountered during such tests and evaluations. Purposes and forms of language tests were briefly discussed. This was followed by a discussion on characteristics of a good language test. The aspect of tests and examinations in West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) was exhaustively discussed to give insight into what both teachers and learners are expected to focus on. It was recommended that students should be encouraged to possess all the recommended textbooks and change their reading habits. Teachers were also encouraged to always make themselves available for the students and be willing to assist them in the areas of difficulties in O Level English.*

KEYWORDS: Testing, Evaluation, English Language Teaching, O level English, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation is one of the ways through which feedback can be obtained from the learners on what their teachers had taught them. Desheng and Vargbese (2013) defined evaluation as the comparison of actual (project) impacts against the agreed strategic plans. According to them, evaluation looks at the original objectives, at what was accomplished, and how it was accomplished.

Students' achievement can be determined through evaluation. In most cases, evaluation of students' achievement is based on the behavioural objectives of instruction or lesson in question. Instructional or behavioural objectives therefore, provide us with a set of yardsticks for evaluating learning. Testing and evaluation in English language in the secondary schools are expected to be based on the content of the curriculum obtained in the syllabus.

Purposes and Forms of Language Tests

Alabi and Babatunde (2001) identified three purposes of language tests:

- i. to determine how much has been learnt from a particular syllabus; (achievement test falls into this category)
- ii. to determine the strength and weaknesses found in students' language, (diagnostic test is an example here)

- iii. to enable the teacher to understand other types of tests (such tests include proficiency and aptitude)

Forms of Language Tests

Desheng and Varghese (2013) classified language test broadly into two types as: (i) testing skills; and (ii) testing knowledge of content

- (i) *Skill testing*: various skills of listening, speaking reading and writing and sub-skills which include comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation are involved in skill testing.
- (ii) *Knowledge testing*: According to them, different kinds of tests in that examine students' knowledge in language include non-referential test, aptitude test, proficiency test, achievement test and diagnostic test.

Alabi and Babatunde (2001) identified four major forms of language tests. These include; achievement, diagnostic, proficiency and aptitude tests.

1. ***Achievement tests***: These assist the teacher to determine whether the students have actually mastered what they have been taught during the teaching-learning process or not.
2. ***Diagnostic tests***: The diagnostic tests are necessary to determine the strengths and weaknesses of students in mastering certain concepts of the language. They are carried out for remedial purposes. Students come from different linguistic background, as such; there are differences in their ability to acquire different aspect of English language during teaching. Some might have problem in the acquisition of certain areas whereas others may find those areas very easy to acquire. This will assist the teacher to lay emphasis on the areas of students' weaknesses during the teaching-learning process to be able to produce students that are balanced in all aspects of English without being majorly deficient in any area.
3. ***Proficiency tests***: Hamp-Lyons (1998) averred that proficiency tests major aim is to establish a test taker's readiness for a particular communicative role. It is also designed for general measure of language ability of the learners. The tests are also used to make predictions about future language performance of the learners. This kind of test is often required of any Nigeria student planning to study in Britain or United States of America.
4. ***Aptitude Tests***: Aptitude tests can be broadly defined as tests that are designed to reveal whether or not somebody is suitable for a particular type of work or course of training. In a language situation, aptitude tests are used to predict to an extent, the ability of a particular candidate can succeed in learning a foreign language. However, the predictive value of aptitude test may not be sustained because there may be other factors that can improve the learner's interest and ability to learn a foreign language during the teaching-learning process. Among these are teacher's methodology, learning environments and availability of materials.

Qualities of a Good Language Test

There are certain qualities expected of a good language test. These are the characteristics of a good language test. They include, among others, validity, reliability, objectivity and economy

1. **Validity:** A good language test should measure what it is supposed to measure. There are different types of validity. These are: (i) face validity (ii) content validity (iii) predictive validity (iv) concurrent validity; and (v) construct validity
2. **Reliability:** Reliability is the quality of being reliable. Language test reliability is the consistency of a test in measuring what it is supposed to measure. A good language test is expected to be reliable. There are two kinds of test reliability. These are intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. Intra-rater reliability indicates that a scorer's mood, physical environment and psychological state of mind may affect the mark given a particular essay at different times. Inter-rater reliability posits that there tend to be variation in the mark given to a particular essay by two or more scorers (markers)
3. **Objectivity:** This quality of a language test ensures that a test should have one and only one correct answer. Examples of these include the "multiple choice" and "True and False" tests.
4. **Economy:** This quality of a test ensures that the cost of administering a test, the time involved in setting and marking it should be commensurate with the expected result obtained from it. A test that takes much time, energy and costs much to construct cannot be said to be economical.

Evaluation of Students' Learning Experiences

Evaluation has earlier been described as one of the ways through which feedback can be obtained from the learners what they have been taught. Students' evaluation should be based on the objectives of teaching earlier set before the commencement of teaching.

Evaluation according to Adewuyi and Oluokun (2001) is the process of gathering and interpreting evidence regarding the problems and progress of learners in achieving desirable educational goals. Ogunwuyi (2004), quoting Okpala, Onocha and Oyedeji (1993) presented evaluation as a process of gathering valid information on the attainment of educational objectives, analyzing and fashioning information to aid judgment on the effectiveness of teaching or an educational programme. Therefore, evaluation is necessary to be able to determine the extent at which learning has taken place. It also assists in determining the level of students' understanding and it gives the opportunity of rating them accordingly

Evaluation, which could be formal or informal, is of three types.

Types of Evaluation

- i. Project
- ii. Observation
- iii. Tests or examinations

Tests and examinations shall be discussed extensively in this work because of its relevance to this work.

Tests or Examinations

The most effective and commonest way of evaluating students in Nigeria and most countries of the world today is through tests and examinations. Tests can be: (i) subjective (ii) objective or (iii) performance

- i. *Subjective tests*: Subjective tests may come in form of essay letter writing. All forms of tests and examinations that take more time to write and grade fall into this category
- ii. *Objective tests*: There is usually one right answer for each item of objective tests. Multiple choice items, matching and completion question, true and false items are examples of objective tests
- iii. *Performance tests*: Performance tests are given to determine the learners' mastery of certain skills and ability acquired over a period of time. The learners are placed under the observation of the teachers and are graded accordingly.

Tests and Examinations in WAEC/NECO O Level English

O level English examinations test five major areas which are: (i) Essay and letter writing (ii) Comprehension (iii) summary (iv) objective questions (v) oral English

- (i) *Essay and Letter Writing*: This is the most important aspect of O level English examination. Four or five questions on general essay or letter writing are usually set out of which the students are expected to pick one. The expected time to spend on essay writing, according to Foyewa (2003), is fifty minutes while the total marks allocated to the section is fifty (50 marks). The mark takes care of the content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy, thus:

Content	-	10marks
Organization	-	10marks
Expression	-	20marks
Mechanical Accuracy	-	<u>10marks</u>
		<u>50marks</u>

The Content: The contents are the points the candidate is expected to discuss. Ideally, the candidate should have at least five points on a chosen topic before proceeding to write an essay on it.

Organization: The points should not be presented anyhow. They are expected to be arranged. Logical arrangement of the candidate's points is known as organization

Expression: This centers on the candidate's ability to express himself/herself in a simple and understandable manner in writing.

Mechanical Accuracy: A candidate is expected to make his writing as flawless as possible. Penalties on wrong choice of words, wrong spelling etc are awarded under Mechanical accuracy.

Examination Questions on Comprehension Passages

The major purpose of tests and examination on comprehension passages is to test/examine students' understanding of the given passages. Students should read a passage at least twice before attempting the questions on it. In WAEC/NECO papers, students are usually given two passages. The passages are compulsory. Questions are asked strictly on the passage given. Students' knowledge of various figures of speech, especially (i) simile, (ii) metaphor (iii) personification (iv) irony and (v) hyperbole are tested here. Also, students' understanding of grammatical terms and functions are examined. The grammatical terms, according to the syllabus, include Noun phrase, noun clause (noun phrases and clauses perform functions of nouns such as (i) subject of the sentence (ii) object of the sentence (direct or indirect) (iii) complement of the sentence (when it comes after copulative verbs like 'is, are, was, were, am (iv) governed by preposition and so on.

Other grammatical terms that are usually tested include 'relative/adjectival clauses (which usually qualifies a particular noun it comes after), adverbial phrases/clauses of time, place, manner, reason and condition. The five adverbial clauses usually tested are known as primary adverbial clauses. Other forms of adverbial clauses which are not usually tested are referred to as secondary adverbials. These include adverbials of degree, purpose, result, concession etc. adverbial clauses are modifiers of verbs, adjectives or another adverb within the passage given.

Students' knowledge of synonyms is usually tested. Every good teacher is expected to introduce various terms as used in registers to the students. Students should be encouraged to familiarize themselves with new words through the use of the dictionary on a daily basis.

Examination Questions on Summary Writing

This aspect tests students' understanding of the passage and their ability to reproduce facts in their own words. Students should be encouraged to read the given passage very well before attempting the questions on it. They should read the passage at least twice before going through the questions. Students should locate answers to the questions first and underline them before they modify those answers using their own words. Certain words or phrases can be changed without loss of meaning; also, students can change active sentences (voices) to passive one.

Questions on summary writing are very technical. Therefore, students should avoid apt or mindless lifting. Otherwise, they can be awarded zero mark for a correct answer that is lifted from the passage.

At times, students may come across difficult passages. When they read such passages, they may not understand the content or theme of the passage. In such a situation, they should not be nervous; they need to be calmed and concentrated on the passage. If after going through the passage at least twice, there is no clue to what the passage is all about, they can now go to the questions on it. The questions on the passage will give an insight to what the passage is all about. They should now go over the passage again, bearing the questions on their minds.

(iv) Examination Questions on Oral English: Objective questions are set to examine students' mastery of this aspect. Teachers should bear it in mind that when teaching oral English, emphasis is on pronunciation rather than spelling. Most teachers often avoid this aspect of English owing to the heavy influence of their mother tongues on their English usage.

The major aspects expected to be covered are:

- i. Consonants and vowel sounds
- ii. Stress

Consonants and vowel sounds: there are forty-four (44) sounds in English, twenty-four (24) consonant sounds and twenty (20) vowel sounds. The twenty four (24) consonant sounds contain sixteen primary and eight (08) secondary. The primary consonant sounds are: /p b t d k g f v l m n r s z h w/, while examples of others are easy to come by, the underlined ones shall be observed briefly.

/k/ as in:

c	-	cup, cat, come
ch	-	chlorine, chemist, Christ
q	-	quay, quest etc
k	-	king, kettle

/f/ in:

f	-	few, fan, force
ph	-	phone, physics, phase

/n/ in:

k	-	knee, knowledge, know
n	-	nine, noon, never

/r/ as in:

r	-	rice, right, room
w	-	wrong, wrights, write

/w/ as in:

o	-	one, once
w	-	want, worst, warm

The remaining eight (8) consonant sounds are categorized as secondary and they should be carefully taught. They include: /θ, ð, ʃ, ʒ, z, tʃ, dʒ/

/θ/ found in 'th' spelling words similar to sound /t/

as in - thin, think, thought, thank etc

/ð/ found in 'th' spelling words similar to sound /d/ as in 'they, those, them, these etc.

/j/ found in 'y' spelling words as in- you, yes, yam, year etc.

/ŋ/ found in words with 'ng' as in - king, song, thing, tongue etc

/s/ found in 'sh' spelling words as in- shoe, shop, ship, shirt etc.

/z/ found in words with 'ure' as in- pleasure, treasure, mixture, picture etc

/tʃ/ found in 'ch' spelling words as in- church, chalk, charm, chapel etc

/dz/ found in 'j' or 'g' spelling words as in- Jesus, jam, John, George, German etc.

Phonemic realization, places of articulation and manner of release of each of the consonant sounds shall not be discussed into details here owing to time constraints.

Vowel Sounds

There are twenty (20) vowel sounds in English. These sounds are classified into two: namely: monothongs and diphthongs.

Monophthongs contain twelve sounds (12). They are easy to identify, therefore emphasis shall not be laid on them, they include:

1. /i/ as in kill, pit, sit, big
2. /i:/ as in key, see, tea, sea
3. /e/ as in said, keg, burry, wet
4. /æ/ as in man, cat, mat, rat
5. /a:/ as in dark, car, park, part
6. / / as in cot, pot, rod
7. / :/ as in or, port, saw, raw
8. /u/ put, could, should, rude
9. /u:/ pool, cool, wool, stool
10. /ʌ/ but, sun, son, money
11. /ɜ:/ girl, shirt, first, term
12. /ð / again, above, alone, awake

Diphthongs are vowel of changing quality. They start as one vowel and end as another. They can be classified into two namely: closing diphthongs and centering diphthongs. The closing diphthongs include:

1. /ei/ as in gate, state, wait, eight
2. /ai/ as in right, write, white, cite
3. / i/ as in oil, coil, boy, soil
4. /əu/ as in cone, hoe, bow, show
5. /au/ as in house, shout, south, mouth

The centering diphthong includes:

6. /ia/ hear, tear, bear, fear
7. /iə/ fair, tear, bear, here
8. /uə/ pour, sour, tour etc

Stress in English: The loudest syllable in a word is usually stressed. In English, there are primary and secondary stresses. However, for the sake of O Level English examination, stressed and unstressed syllables are the terms to be used. Students should be made to realize that the second to the last syllable is usually stressed in English. Also, most syllables before – ion, –on are usually stressed. The stressed syllables are written in capital for the purpose of emphasis considers the following examples:

demoCRAtic, jubiLAtion, congratuLAtion

Another area to consider is the emphatic stress. Emphasis is usually on the performer of an action, a particular place or event here. Notice that all other options will bear the name of that particular person, place or event. The one that does not contain the name is usually the answer. Consider the following example:

LAIDE wore a blue dress?

- (a) Did Laide wear a green dress?
- (b) Did Laide buy a blue dress?
- (c) Did Laide wear a blue cap?
- (d) Did Ope wear a blue dress?

All the above options contains 'Laide' in their structure except option '(d)', therefore, since emphasis is on Laide, the answer to the question is (d).

(v) Examination questions on general objectives.

This section contains one hundred objective questions with four or five options (i.e. A – D or A – E). A good teacher will ensure that all aspects of register in the syllabus are carefully taught. Students should be introduced to synonyms and antonyms of words earlier enough to be able to cover every aspect of the syllabus.

Students should be exposed to various past questions on objectives and be encouraged to have textbooks where past questions on objectives are compiled. Regular exercises should be given to students, assignments and classworks on this aspect should be given and marked regularly. This will assist the learners in familiarizing themselves with the aspect of objectives and prepare them for questions on this aspect in O Level English examinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As teachers of English, efforts should be made to encourage students to acquire textbooks on English since the government cannot provide all needed textbooks on the subject. Wisdom should however be applied here by not forcing the students to buy those books.

Students should be encouraged to change their reading habits. The teachers and school management should encourage the students to make adequate use of the library.

Teachers of English should also make themselves available and be part of markers of O Level English papers. If teachers of English in various schools are participating in marking O Level English papers, new trends, innovations and changes in O Level English will be made known to them thereby equipping their students with necessary information to pass the O Level English at a sitting, .

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