International trends in English language assessment: Implications for Bangladesh

Dr Prithvi Shrestha
Department of Languages
The Open University, UK
Prithvi.Shrestha@open.ac.uk

Overview

- Language assessment: what do we mean?
- Why assess a learner’s language abilities?
- A historical perspective of language assessment
- Classroom-based language assessment
- Impact of language assessment
- Case studies from other countries
- Local study: EIA
- Implications for Bangladesh
- Questions or comments
Language assessment: what do we mean?

• What does it mean to you?

"In the context of language teaching and learning, 'assessment' refers to the act of collecting information and making judgments about a language learner's knowledge of a language and ability to use it."

Carol Chapelle and Geoff Brindley, Universities of Iowa State and Macquarie. (cited in Glen Fulcher http://languagetesting.info/whatis/lt.html )
Language assessment

- A social and political activity? (McNamara, 2011)
- Consequences for wider society
- Political decisions
- Economic activities
Why assess a learner’s language abilities?

• Think about the question ....
• Main purpose:
  • Make decisions
  – High-stakes and low-stakes
    • Selection
    • Placement
    • Diagnosis (formative)
    • Progress (formative)
    • Grading (summative)
    • Teacher performance
  • Suitability of a programme or policy

(Bachman & Palmer, 1996; McNamara & Roever, 2006)
A historical perspective of language assessment

- Focus on accuracy until 1970s
  - Grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and essay
- Focus on communication:
- Advent of communicative language teaching in the 1970s (Hymes, 1972)
- Real use of language in a social context
- Shift towards a social dimension of ELT
- Beginning of communicative language testing and assessment (Canale & Swain, 1980)
- Move towards assessing students’ language skills in a range of contexts (Taylor, 2006)
Classroom-based language assessment

• Rise of classroom-based language assessment in both developed and developing countries (Davison & Leung, 2009)

• Different terms used
  – Teacher-based assessment
  – Alternative assessment
  – Assessment for learning
  – School-based assessment
  – Formative assessment
Classroom-based language assessment

Definition of classroom-based language assessment:

• ‘any reflection by **teachers** (and/or **learners**) on the qualities of a learner’s (or group of learners’) work and the use of that information by **teachers** (and/or **learners**) for teaching, learning (feedback), reporting, management or socialization purposes.’ (bold mine, Hill & McNamara, 2012, p. 396)

• Classroom-based assessment increasingly supported by government policies

• Continuous evaluation cycle (being tried in India)
Dynamic assessment (DA)

- Focus on future language abilities rather than past ones
- Often used in clinical psychology and special needs education (Haywood & Lidz, 2007)
- Recently tried in classroom-based language assessment (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012)
Language portfolio

‘a systematic and selective collection of a student’s work that has been assembled to demonstrate a student’s motivation, academic growth and level of achievement’ (Norton & Wiburg, 1998, p. 237)

Courtesy: http://blog.calicospanish.com/portfolio
Technology in language assessment

- Computer-based assessment
- Use of mobile devices
- Use of internet
- Digital Bangladesh
Impact of assessment

- Teaching and learning
- Wider society
- Positive
- Negative
Case studies from other countries

- Hong Kong
- Japan
- Macedonia
- Malaysia
- New Zealand
- Thailand
Hong Kong (Berry, 2011; Hamp-Lyons, 2009)

- Predominantly exam-oriented education system
- Assessment reform in 1990s
- Further reform in 2000s: move towards assessment for learning
- Emphasis on link between assessment and teaching and learning
- Basic Competency Assessment – low-stakes; enhance teaching and learning
- Oral assessment for English language
- School-based assessment in 2001
- Comprehensive professional development materials for oral English SBA
- Resistance from teachers and negative attitudes of school personnel
- Need for an increased understanding of SBA among stakeholders
Japan (Sasaki, 2008)

- Introduction of communicative English language syllabus in 1990s
- Emphasis on practical communication skills (impact of globalisation)
- Use of criterion-referenced assessment (i.e., meeting criteria)
- Commercial tests used by higher secondary schools (e.g., TOEIC)
- Emphasis on teacher professional development
Macedonia (Murchan, Shiel, & Mickovska, 2012)

- Medium of instruction in four languages in schools: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian
- Teachers solely responsible for assessment in primary schools (teacher autonomy)
- Launch of school-based assessment in 2008 (ongoing):
  - Development of assessment standards and ethics
  - Comprehensive professional development of teachers, administrators regarding assessment
  - Repository of print and digital learning resources on assessment
Malaysia (Lan Ong, 2010)

- Primarily dominated by centralised public examinations
- Primary education – external exam on reading skills in English
- Lower secondary – external exam of English language; subjects like geography and science through school-based assessment as well
- Secondary – public examination (written) and school-based assessment (oral)
- Special arrangements for students with special needs
- School-based assessment in use
- New assessment system from 2011: combination of SBA, external, psychometric and physical activity assessment
- Concerns among teachers: lack of clarity in terms of their role; top-down approach; time constraints; professional development
New Zealand (East & Scott, 2011)

- Assessment reform in foreign language education (e.g., French)
- Equal weighting of listening, speaking, reading and writing
- One third classroom-based assessment
- Focus on communicative and authentic language tasks
- Assessment of spoken interaction
- Collection of students’ spoken and written interactions (inside and outside classroom)
- Student selection of evidence guided by teachers (language portfolio)
Thailand (Prapphal, 2008)

• Curriculum reform in 1999 – move towards communicative language teaching
• Introduction of school-based assessment by government
• BUT emphasis on standardised English language tests due to university entry requirement (TOEFL scores)
• Huge impact of university entry requirement on school assessment
• Teachers not supported professionally
• Lack of language assessment literacy among teachers
• Private tutoring and coaching schools for test preparation
English in Action Study

Farhan Azim
Deputy Head, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, English in Action

ENGLISH in ACTION
English in Action

A large-scale English language development programme funded by UKAid, implemented by the Government of Bangladesh

Aim: Contribute to the economic development of Bangladesh by providing English language as a tool for better access to the world economy

Target audience – 25 million learners

- Primary school teachers and students
- Secondary school teachers and students
- Adult learners

Implementation period - 2009 to 2017

Three phases - pilot, up-scaling and institutionalisation
EIA study: Background

• In 1974, Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission reported the need for introducing external and internal examinations for student assessment.

• In 1977, National Curriculum and Textbook Board stated that assessment should be held as a continuous process.

• Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) were introduced in 1992.

• School Based Assessment (SBA) is functioning at the secondary level since 2004.

• Since 1986, English became a compulsory subject from grade one to twelve.

• During the 90s’, there was an increased focus on using ‘Communicative Approach’ to English Language Teaching (ELT).
EIA study: Objectives

- To explore the level of alignment between the secondary English language curriculum and current assessment practices
EIA study: Key findings

- Most teachers shared partial views about the concept of curriculum.
- Communicative approach removes students’ fear about learning English and being assessed.
- The ‘question and answer technique’ is used the most for formative assessment purposes.
- English in Action teachers are assessing all four language skills through formative assessment techniques.
- Teachers believe assessment and feedback play two types of roles in learning - they help students to perform better and teachers to improve their teaching.
- School Based Assessment (SBA) is not implemented properly in all schools – lack of standardized practice.
- Assessment of listening and speaking skills remain neglected in summative assessments.
Conclusions and implications

- Clear policy on language assessment
- Teacher professional development on language assessment before implementing a new assessment system
- Focus on communication (i.e., meaning making) with the integration of accuracy (including grammar)
- Assessment literacy among students (and parents/community)
- Involvement of students in language assessment (e.g., self-assessment, peer assessment, language portfolio)
- Hands-on experience of classroom-based assessment for teachers
- Focus on continuous assessment rather than ‘snap-shot’ assessment
- Consideration of university entrance exams and reform if needed
- Consideration of using technology in language assessment (e.g., mobile devices)
Questions & comments?

• Prithvi.Shrestha@open.ac.uk
References (1)


References (2)


