Classroom Assessment for Language Teaching

Classroom Assessment for Language Teaching:

Challenges, Choices, and Consequences

Edited by

Eddy White and Tahnee Bucher

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[illegible] *Teacher-made Assessments* [illegible] *Classroom-based Assessment is an extraordinarily important component of teaching and learning that has long received insufficient attention* [illegible]

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Chapter Focus/Organization

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SECTION 1 –

ASSESSMENT AND EMOTIONS

CHAPTER 1

TESTING ENVIRONMENT, EMOTIONS, AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE: CLASSROOM AND PROGRAM WIDE

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Abstract

The testing environment is a critical aspect of student performance. Students who experience anxiety and other negative emotions when faced with an assessment generally perform at a lower level than their peers who feel confident and secure in their abilities. This chapter explores the relationship of emotional barriers on student achievement and provides strategies to mitigate them. Through a comprehensive literature review, the authors found evidence that test anxiety, previous assessment experiences, cultural background and self-efficacy beliefs, and the relationship between the student and instructor impact performance on assessments. The authors recommend several strategies to overcome these negative hurdles in order to improve performance and achievement as well as ensure reliability in classroom and program outcomes. Classroom strategies include building schema for testing vocabulary and protocols, using formative assessment to influence instruction, implementing constructive feedback and metacognitive habits, and creating strong relationships between the teacher and student. Program wide strategies focus on teacher training, standardization, and the use of authentic assessments. In addition to sharing strategies, the authors describe the challenges faced by administrators and teachers when implementing changes to assessment routines and the success achieved by students after these new strategies were realized.

Introduction

The instructor looks across her classroom and observes her students [illegible]. Some [illegible] neck and into their cheeks. Some students tap their pencils as if counting [illegible], [illegible] neighbor [illegible] this task holds more weight than general classwork. This scene may sound [illegible] of [illegible] faced with assessments. Emotional responses to the words *assessment* or *test* exist on a continuum. The testing environment and process, relationship between the student and teacher, and student background shape how these emotional hindrances affect achievement for some students and program outcomes.

Emotional responses present in a variety of ways. The most commonly observed response is test anxiety, which [illegible] categorized into two types: trait and state (Speilberger & Vagg, 1995). Trait anxiety is defined as a more permanent and pervasive emotional tendency based on personality and disposition, whereas state anxiety is experienced when a person is faced with a specific task at a particular time (Grant, 2016). In the classroom setting, students who exhibit anxious characteristics when faced with assessment situations are generally undergoing the latter type of anxiety. All types of students can experience some degree of test anxiety, and English language learners are no exception. [illegible] fact, those learners studying in a second language learning environment are especially susceptible to anxiety due to additional stressors they face including recent immigraton, acclimation to a new culture, and introduction to the American education system (Grant, 2016).

Another factor influencing emotional responses to assessment is individual perception. Both teachers and students may assign a greater value to a task labeled *assessment* and therefore respond to the situation based on one's personal perspective. This can lead to students or teachers attributing more or less value to an assigned task and thereby influence its results with a greater negative emotional response. Jung, W[illegible]nke, Hamburger, and Knauff (2014) purported that a person's emotional state affects their performance on a task. Their analysis also suggested that one's cognitive ability is impacted by their emotional condition, and this can influence motivation and attention to task.

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Gaokao

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[illegible]

Challenges

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Student Emotional Responses

[illegible] a [illegible] a [illegible] but [illegible] students it has a profound and sometimes debilitating effect. These negative [illegible] often referred [illegible] as test anxiety. Like other emotional responses, test anxiety occurs on a range with those severely impacted [illegible] those with just a moderate response. Test anxiety is estimated to intensely affect as many as 16% to 20% of students and moderately affect as many as 18%, resulting in students 'freezing or blanking out' when faced with an assessment. "High test anxiety reduces working memory, confuses reasoning, increases mistakes, and lowers [illegible] scores. Students with high anxiety perform around twelve [illegible] Association, n.d., para. 2).

Zeidner and Matthews (as cited by Huntley, Young, Temple, Longworth, [illegible] "phenomenological, affective, and behavioural responses that accompany concern about the possible negative consequences of poor performance in [illegible] or [illegible] Vagg (1995) argued that educational and professional opportunities are often decreased because the negative effects of test anxiety result [illegible] a minimized view of an individual's actual ability and skill. In addition, Steinberg and Horwitz (1986) noted that anxiety, specifically in second language learners, has both an impact on discrete skill evaluation, idea expansion, fluency, and grammatical structure [illegible] speaking and writing. Yan and Horwitz (2008) asserted that there are several factors which influence language learner anxiety, including "motivation, cultural factors, the students' own coping skills, attention, self-concept, beliefs about language learning, and the specific teaching methodology the student experiences" (p. 152). Moreover, Young suggested that there are six categories of language learner anxiety which include "personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing" (as cited by Yan & Horwitz, 2008, p. 152). Based on this literature review, test anxiety is an emotional barrier which may reduce a student's ability to perform and demonstrate mastery in a testing situation.

Although test anxiety is a commonly accepted response to assessment, it [illegible] not the only response. According to Thomas, Cassady, and Heller (2017), "student performance can be adversely impacted by stressors within and beyond the academic setting" (p. 40). These internal stressors may include the difficulty of a task, anxiety due to subject matter, and perceived academic burden, while external stressors may include financial issues,

[illegible]

[illegible]

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  - [illegible]

- Paralysis and inability to perform the task:
  - Students freeze and are incapable of completing the task.
- A female Egyptian student was in our mid-level speaking and listening class. In class, she could easily talk with her peers and could present information to the whole group [illegible] [illegible] effective way using level appropriate English vocabulary and grammar structure. However, when asked to complete the End of term Speaking [illegible], unintelligible language, and physiological responses like headache [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] communication, April 13, 2017 [illegible]
- [illegible]
  - Students are [illegible] afraid of poor performance that they resort to cheating
- A Chinese male student in a mid-level reading and writing class was caught using a slip of paper taped to his hat with vocabulary words and their definitions while taking a test. When asked about his actions, he claimed that he was so afraid of a low grade that he needed support to complete the task even though his teacher had asked him what the words meant [illegible] an informal setting and he was able to do so without error.
- Lower performance compared to in-class tasks:
  - Students perform at a proficient level on ‘non-test’ tasks, but when asked to complete an assessment, increased anxiety leads to lower performance.
- A female Saudi Arabian student in an intermediate level writing class was asked to complete a timed writing test. She was asked to write about a topic that she was not able to prepare for [illegible] advance, using the same essay format that she had used in class. She performed poorly compared to her in-class writing samples. When asked, she explained that she felt frozen and as though her mind was blocked and could not think of ideas or words to express them.

Clearly, negative emotional responses like test anxiety and worry, personal beliefs about one’s self, and ineffective coping mechanisms impact student performance. At our institution, we used these observations to make changes to our assessments and the testing environment. These choices were made to combat decreased achievement resulting from emotional reactions rather than actual educational deficits.

Impacts of Perception, Background, and Values

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[illegible]

[illegible]

organize learning tasks, and successfully meet personal expectations. Saudi students must be taught that success is achieved through effort and discipline and is not an exclusive function of one’s ability (Alrabai, 2018). These beliefs about self directly impact student performance and can result in lower achievement.

Educator knowledge of differing cultural experiences and how they influence performance has an effect on overall testing performance. Our [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] groups [illegible] distinct testing behaviors and our methods changed to address performance [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

The Testing Environment, Program Assessment Protocols, and Standardization

Desks lined up in rows, silence, and a teacher walking around the perimeter of the room watching with laser like focus is an image many students and educators imagine when the test environment is mentioned. Our challenge was that the testing environment did not promote student success. Strict adherence to scripts, required testing templates, and a lack of testing experience led to decreased achievement on formative and summative exams.

Some teachers felt that what was being tested on the summative exam did not match how it was taught. Some felt obliged to follow a script or set of directions that did not fit the group of students being assessed. Still others failed to pre-teach or practice the exam format resulting in students performing poorly simply because they had no prior knowledge of the technology or format being used. Additionally, some teachers were very strict in their adherence to guidelines while others opted to make adjustments, including unintentionally giving too little information, which resulted in students missing key directions and time limits thereby impacting performance. Lastly, some teachers were perceived as maternal or paternal while others were seen as friends and still others were viewed as authoritarian resulting in a variety of student behaviors that impacted the testing environment negatively.

Challenges: Conclusion

Emotional responses, individual perceptions, and the assessment setting and conventions altered student achievement at our institution. Student performance [illegible] class did not regularly align with the program wide assessments. Testing in one classroom to the next was varied in test delivery

[illegible]

Choices

[illegible]

Authentic Speaking Interviews

[illegible]

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- [illegible]
- [illegible]

Process-Based Timed Writing

[illegible] timed writing tests since the early years of the program. Standardization and [illegible] score the test herself. This was problematic for several reasons. A student in Instructor [illegible]’s class could have a higher chance of achieving a passing score than in Instructor Y’s course at the same level despite the same amount of skill, production, and effort. In addition, there was a large amount of variability and a reliance on outdated testing and assessment practices in teacher-based assessment (Davison & Leung, 2009). Finally, accreditation agencies have also focused on program-wide standardization as an area of [illegible] The [illegible] changes were necessary to ensure standardization and accountability existed across all aspects of the program.

[illegible] 0 [illegible] instructional level leaders attended a TESOL international conference session that presented information on an integrated process-based timed [illegible]BTW) [illegible], 2015 [illegible] he [illegible] a traditional timed writing exam to the PBTW. We felt that there would be several advantages to adopting the exam. Advantages included increased familiarity (He & Shi, 2008), additional planning time prior to writing (Worden, 2009), and greater schema for students to draw on in order to successfully write about a topic (Esmaeili, 2002).

This type of exam had two disadvantages. Instead of taking one fifty-minute class period, it required two periods. This required teachers to adjust their pacing guides to reflect time dedicated to two class periods for testing plus time needed to train students on the new process. In addition, it was not as easy to administer as a traditional timed writing exam. Previously, the exam was simply handed out, read aloud, and then students had fifty minutes to complete it. With this new process, it would require that teachers instruct students prior [illegible] the exam on how the process would work, as well as follow a new process. This process included watching background building videos, reading related texts, having a class discussion and group discussion, and then reading the writing prompt. Teachers had to accept the new procedure in order to ensure that consistency was present in all testing rooms during the final timed writing. Lastly, it was important that students also embraced the new process and saw the benefits of building background information on a topic so that the writing task only measured writing.

Both attendees felt that the PBTW, if adopted, would [illegible] our organization an opportunity to transition to a final written exam based upon the type of [illegible] Adopting [illegible] PBTW

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Classroom Assessment

Formative assessment

[illegible]

Informal formative assessments

[illegible]

Table 1: *Informal Formative Assessment Examples*

[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]

Authentic and Performance Assessment

Table 2: ***Authentic, Experiential, and Performance Assessment***

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Metacognition and Feedback

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[illegible]