

ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ

ОЦЕНКА АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКИХ ЦЕЛЕЙ В УНИВЕРСИТЕТАХ С АНГЛИЙСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ ОБУЧЕНИЯ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ УНИВЕРСИТЕТА УЗБЕКИСТАНА)

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EAP ASSESSMENT IN AN ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION UNIVERSITY: A CASE FROM UZBEKISTAN

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Количество университетов с английским языком обучения значительно увеличивается в республике Узбекистане. Большинство из этих университетов предоставляют программу английского языка для академических целей (в некоторых университетах этот предмет также называется академическим английским). В данной статье подчеркивается важность оценки знаний в английском языке для академических целей, представленных на третьем уровне (базовый уровень) в университете английского языка в Узбекистане. В статье дана критическая оценка эссе и объясняется предоставление предпочтения оцениванию портфолио.

ABSTRACT

A number of English medium instruction universities in Uzbekistan increasing considerably. Most of these universities deliver English for Academic Purposes module (it is also called Academic English in some universities). This article highlights the importance of assessment in English for Academic Purposes modules delivered in Level 3 (Foundation Studies) in an English medium university in Uzbekistan. The paper critically evaluates an essay and explains why preference has been given to portfolio assessment.

Ключевые слова: оценивание, формирующая оценка, английский для академических целей, портфолио, эссе

Key words: Assessment, formative assessment, pre-sessional EAP, essay portfolio

Introduction

A surge in the number of non-native speaker students in the UK universities [1; 2] and the establishment of branches or franchises of English medium instruction universities in non-English speaking countries are increasing the need for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) modules. The paper will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of essays as one of the EAP assessment tasks and rationalizes why portfolio assessment may be better.

Main part

Most EAP classes are held in a pre-sessional level and in many cases, the EAP assessment has a 'gatekeeper' function. Therefore, much attention should be paid to how English for Academic Purposes module assessment is administered. The main reason for that is that "students largely study what is assessed or more accurately, what they perceive the assessment system to require" [3, p.15]. This situation should make teachers think carefully before setting an assessment task to students. This is increasingly important, especially as Seviour (2015) states the module assessment has a 'dual role' [4,p.84]. Firstly, in the case of pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes module, students have to learn academic language and literacy skills that are required on their degree courses. Secondly, they should take summative assessment

which aims to test their readiness to start an English medium degree course [4, p.85].

From the perspective of students, in some cases, it is vitally important to obtain a pass mark without thinking much about the learning that should be gained throughout the module or course [4]. Gibbs has quite a similar opinion: students have become strategic and they focus on "what they believe will be assessed and what they believe will gain good grades" [5p.23]. Banerjee and Wall point out that the leaders of English for Academic Purposes courses should find the ways to determine if students have achieved the course learning outcomes and are prepared enough to enter degree courses [1]. Different universities have various approaches to deal with cases. Some universities administer their in-house test whereas others require their potential students to take external examinations such as internationally recognized IELTS, TOEFL, etc. According to Banerjee and Wall unfortunately no universal approach to assess and report the performance of pre-sessional EAP students can be found [1].

The biggest challenge that course tutors and organizers face is to be even more strategic and be always a step or two ahead of the students. They should set the assessment in a way that it must support learning [4] if they can use an in-house test. For an external test, Weigle encourages teachers to ask questions about the

reliability and validity of the test which their students have to take [6]. I think it is the responsibility of course leaders to help teachers with a quality assessment to measure students' ability properly.

Essay- the most popular type of writing genre

Essay is one of the writing genres that many students are engaged with in English for Academic Purposes modules in many universities. In fact, "essay tests are the most crucially and widely used direct writing assessments worldwide" [7, p.2] not only in international exams but also in EAP as well. In order to speak the same language with reader, I would like to clarify the term 'essay' before starting the discussion about it. First, I want to examine the dictionary definition of the word. Cambridge dictionary online defines the word 'essay' as follows: "a short piece of writing on a particular subject, especially one done by students as part of the work for a course" while Hounsell defined the 'essay' as "an ordered presentation of an argument well-supported by evidence" [8 p.111]. This is more specific than the previous definition. Andrews points out in his article called 'The End of the Essay', the word 'essay' came into English from French word 'essai' which means 'an attempt'[9, p.117]. He argues that "the term's derivation from words meaning 'first drafts' or 'attempts' is not reflected in the current use of the term to describe finished assignments submitted for assessment or examination" [9, p.117]. Considering the French meaning of the word 'essay' and the definition given by Hounsell, I will re-define it as follow: a piece of multi-drafted writing which has an ordered presentation of an argument well supported by evidence [8]. I think this can serve as working definition for this paper. In addition, this definition may well suit to the case of EAP.

Although the essay has been used in academia for a long time, has been a part of most internationally recognized tests and has been called a 'default genre of writing' [9; 10], it has been criticized by many authors [11; 12; etc.]. For example, Tuckman raises the issue with the artificiality of the essays[12]. To the best of my knowledge, this is what Bachman and Palmer called 'authenticity' of test [13]. They define authenticity as "the degree correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test tasks to the features of a TLU [Target Language Use] task" [13, p.23]. In other words, Fulcher defines it as bringing the lifelike situation into testing [14, p.222]. Arguably, not many students will write essays when they graduate from a university or not many jobs require them to write essays. From that sense, essay may not be very authentic task for many students. "What constitutes an authentic writing task will differ greatly for different groups of language learners" [6, p.98]. It is difficult to say that essay is an authentic task for many students. However, if we talk about students at pre-sessional level, writing essays may be considered as authentic for them as the following three years, while doing their undergraduate studies, they will be doing similar pieces of writing [15]. Thus, "if the test looks authentic, it is then to have face validity" [14, p.222]. This means that the task reflects the real world situations. " If the test tasks

reflect real-life tasks in terms of identified conditions and operations it is easier to state what a student can do through the medium of English" (Weir, 1993, p.28).

Gibbs raises an interesting issue with essays and this can be related to the authenticity [17]. "As student essays do not have such a real audience students are encouraged to produce 'claptrap' and 'turgid gibberish' as well as obfuscation and incoherent rambling posing as academic rigour" [17 in 18]. Similarly, another author raises the issue of audience in essays and suggests using a different genre-"a 1000 word briefing for MP" which not only has a specific audience but also the task becomes more focused. [18, p.105]. The idea of having the task addressed to certain audience makes sense as this will also help students identify the register of writing easily.

A practical issue faced by teachers with essays is that marking the students' scripts seems to be a time-consuming activity [12, p.22], especially now when student numbers and class sizes have increased [3, p.12]. My personal case will illustrate this point very well. There were 12-16 students in a class till 2008 and this number is now doubled in each class. It took me roughly an hour to assess a 1000 word essay and write feedback. One teacher may assess around 60-75 students' essays. It takes quite a lot of time and energy.

Winter also criticizes the essay genre and gives several reasons[13]. One of them is the time pressure for students as in many cases essays are submitted at the end of course. This is one of the issues that is difficult to avoid as students' lives are full of deadlines and they will have to learn to effectively manage their time. Another reason Winter raises is the formality of the essays, which he believes that it is difficult for students to follow. In addition, in many cases EAP "essays have to be presented as authoritative products rather than as ways of learning through reading, discussion and reflection" [13]. However, this may depend on the writing approach for essays. Seviour describes the way he encourages his students to write essays [4]. I think taking a process approach to writing and limiting students with carefully selected texts by tutors will enable students to focus on reading more. Furthermore, students will have an opportunity to discuss the texts in during the class time with other fellow students before doing the writing. In its turn, taking this approach enables course lecturers to scaffold their student's learning and writing in a better way. From students' side, they will be able to multi-draft their essays. "Multiple-draft essay tests may provide a multi-dimensional view that offers greater construct validity" [19, p. 30].

I will continue this review by exploring more positive aspects of EAP essays. Hounsell believes essay-writing plays a central role within higher education as it has dual purposes: an assessment tool and "an avenue to learning" [8,p.106]. Well-constructed essay tasks make students think, organize their thoughts in a systematic way and then write [12, p.22. From the perspective of a teacher, Tuckman argues that essay tasks are easier to construct than multiple-choice test items [12, p.21]. Also, essay helps to assess higher cognitive processes such as

“application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. These will involve not process but product as well” [12, p.21]. However, one may not expect all these at pre-sessional EAP at foundation level (UK Level 3) as this level is considered as descriptive. At that level, some elements of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation can be found in potential students’ essays but this is not to bigger extent.

Andrews also argues in favour of essays as assessment tool. “It is a genre and text-type in which explicitness is a key characteristic” [9, p.221]. A good writer of the essay clearly communicates the message with reader succinctly. According to Andrews, the essay can ‘lend itself to persuasive discourse’ [9,p.221]. The fact that ideas, which are connected to each other meaningfully, are stated explicitly and supported by some evidence convinces the reader to trust the writer. Consequently, these qualities make the essay a good assessment tool, which helps tutors or assessors to separate ‘the sheep from the goats’ [9, p.221].

However, very valid argument from Weigle, I think, should not be ignored. She argues that “it is difficult to generalize from a single writing [from the timed essay] sample to a much broader universe of writing in different genres and for different purposes and audiences” [6, p.197]. Having weighed up advantages and disadvantages of essays, it was decided to assess students in foundation year Academic English with a portfolio assessment as one of the components to contribute to the final mark of the module.

Portfolio

It is widely known the portfolios have been borrowed from the field of architecture where it was broadly used. Weigle argues that portfolio tasks allow making broader inferences about students’ writing abilities [6]. As portfolio comprises different writing genres, it can serve the purpose very well. The Academic English module sets a portfolio assessment consisting of three writing tasks of different genres: summary-response essay, blog and reflection. Giving students a proper portfolio assessment task requires a lot of thorough planning and work from teachers [20].

Following the three principles of setting portfolio assessment- collection, selection and reflection [6], we give students an opportunity to collect their pieces of writing. For example, during 12 weeks, students write 3 summary-response essays and blogs which contribute to the principles of collection. Then they select a piece of essay and blog and submit for marking. In addition, to enable students to be reflective, we encourage them to reflect on their experience of portfolio completion, collection and selection.

As the essay was heavily criticized both in the literature and by my colleagues, it was decided to include a summary response essay as one of the entries in the portfolio. Students read an article and listen to a lecture on a similar topic and they summarise both and give their stance on the issue discussed in the article and lecture. We believe this task is more authentic as students will be doing this at higher levels at university.

Each task in the portfolio assessment is set in a way that it promotes higher order thinking which will be very worthwhile in their academic studies in the

future. To help students learn effectively, a special attention is paid to formative assessment in the process of portfolio tasks completion. According to Fulcher formative assessment is used in the process of learning and its main aim is to improve learning [21, p.68]. Most importantly, “The most powerful educational tool for raising achievements and preparing children to be lifelong learners, in any context, is formative assessment” [22, p.3]. Therefore, students are given an opportunity to get feedback for each piece of writing from both teachers and their peers. This process enables students to know how well they are performing and whether they are achieving set intended learning outcomes of the modules. Moreover, the selecting pieces to submit for assessment well contributes to the improvement of their decision-making skills.

Also submitting the pieces of writing for formative feedback prevents procrastination considerably and improves the quality of work dramatically. Also by preparing different drafts and improving their work, students will follow a process writing procedure.

Conclusion

To sum up, although an essay has been widely utilized as EAP task, it has been heavily criticized. Setting students better alternative assessment tasks seems to benefit students. In addition, it will help teachers to make better inferences about students’ writing skills. Following the principles of setting portfolio task improves learning and increases chances of admitting better students to the degree courses. Therefore, it is vitally important to set an assessment that encourages students to learn. In that sense I completely agree with Gibbs who believes “Assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behavior” [5, p 23].

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PHILOSOPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF PERSONALISED EDUCATION OF ADULTS IN TERMS OF POSTMODERN PLURALISM

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ФИЛОСОФСКИЕ И МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПЕРСОНАЛИЗИРОВАННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ ВЗРОСЛЫХ ПОЗИЦИЙ ПОСТМОДЕРНИСТСКОГО ПЛЮРАЛИЗМА

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ABSTRACT

This research is devoted to the study of the methodology of personalized adult education in the value context of the historical and cultural epoch of Russia and the world as a whole, presented in the scientific and pedagogical discourse reflecting the pluralistic specifics of post-industrial society. The purpose of this study is to determine the specifics of personalized training and additional professional programs "Linguistics and Intercultural Interaction" in the formal education system being limited with temporal and economic framework designed to prepare graduates to meet the new professional activities of an educator. The problem field of this research is related to the theoretical and practical justification of the use of the methodology of language and cultural pluralism, as well as the pluralism of goals, objectives and content of adult education, focused on innovation and leadership development, on creative approaches to thinking, especially in school, where resources are limited, and subject to constant changes. The objectives of the research are threefold: a) to develop the principles of program development, b) the corpus of personalized humanitarian practices for organizing the event learning spaces of creative interaction of the participants, and c) to facilitate the stages of implementation of updated programs, and methodological content of training, as well as organizational difficulties associated with the formation of new professional competencies of the graduates of the programs in a new socio-cultural transforming space. In conclusion, the main results of the study at different stages of implementation of personalized learning technology