

SETTING PURPOSE FOR ASSESSMENT: SELECTING THE RIGHT ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

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БАҲОЛАШ УЧУН МАҚСАД ҚЎЙИШ. ТЎҒРИ АЛТЕРНАТИВ БАҲОЛАШ ШАКЛИНИ ТАНЛАЙ ОЛИШ

Зауре Сапарали кизи КЕРТАЕВА

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НАЗНАЧЕНИЕ ЦЕЛИ ДЛЯ ОЦЕНКИ. ВЫБОР ПРАВИЛЬНОЙ АЛТЕРНАТИВНОЙ ОЦЕНКИ

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Abstract. There is a direct link between assessment and teaching, which is not always taken into consideration. This may prevent assessment fulfilling teaching process and helping achieve teaching aims. The issue raised in the article is related to factors connecting assessment to language teaching. In particular, it discusses about how to make assessment purposeful and how to opt for the right alternative so that teaching could meet learners` needs and teachers` objectives.

By investigating existing materials on the topic, the author discusses the classification of tests according to their functions; and provides a five-component guideline that helps language teachers assess their students` language skills purposefully. Suggested guideline highlights the importance of teachers` awareness of abovementioned classification.

Moreover, the article includes detailed description of three forms of alternative assessment — portfolios, journals and peer-assessment. By discussing benefits of those three alternatives and challenges in their application, the author proposes some recommendations concerning the use of each assessment form.

Keywords: alternative assessment; diagnostic test; proficiency test; achievement test; placement test; portfolio; journal; peer assessment.

Аннотация. Ўқитиш ва баҳолаш бевосита боғлиқ бўлиб, лекин бу боғлиқлик ҳар доим ҳам эътиборга олинмайди. Бу эса баҳолаш ўқитишни тўлдиришига ва ўқитиш мақсадларига

эришилишига тўскинлик қилади. Мақолада кўтарилган мавзу ҳам баҳолашни ўқитишга боғловчи омиларга тааллуқли. Хусусан, мақолада ўқитувчи мақсадларини амалга ошириш ва тил ўрганувчиларнинг талабларини қондириш учун баҳолашни қандай мақсадли қилиш ва альтернатив баҳолаш шаклларини қандай тўғри танлаш муҳокама қилинади.

Мавзуга доир материалларни ўрганиш орқали, муаллиф тестларни вазибаларига кўра классификацияланишини муҳокама қилади ва беш қисмдан иборат кўрсатмани тавсия қилади. Бу кўрсатма ўқитувчиларнинг юқорида айтиб ўтилган тест турларидан хабардорлигининг аҳамиятини таъкидлайди.

Бундан ташқари, мақола учта альтернатив баҳолаш шакллари портфолио, журнал ва шерик бўлиб баҳолашнинг батафсил тасвирини ўз ичига олади. Учта альтернатив баҳолашшаклларининг афзалликлари ва уни йўлга қўйишдаги қийинчиликларни муҳокама қилиш орқали, муаллиф ҳар бирдан фойдаланиш бўйича бир қанча тавсияларни беради.

Калит сўзлар: альтернатив баҳолаш; диагностик тест; малака тести; ўзлаштириш даражаси тести; гуруҳларга саралаш тести; портфолио; шерик бўлиб баҳолаш.

Аннотация. Между оцениванием и обучением существует прямая связь, которая не всегда учитывается. Поднятая в статье проблема связана с факторами, связывающими оценку с преподаванием языка. В частности, в ней обсуждается, как сделать оценку целесообразной и как выбрать правильную альтернативу, чтобы обучение могло отвечать потребностям учащихся и целям учителей.

Исследуя существующие материалы по теме, автор обсуждает классификацию тестов в соответствии с их функциями; и предоставляет пятикомпонентную рекомендацию, которая помогает учителям языка целенаправленно оценивать языковые навыки своих учеников. Предлагаемая рекомендация подчеркивает важность понимания учителями вышеупомянутой классификации.

Кроме того, статья содержит подробное описание трех форм альтернативной оценки — портфолио, журналов и коллегиальной оценки. Обсуждая преимущества этих трех альтернатив и проблем в их применении, автор предлагает некоторые рекомендации, касающиеся использования каждой формы оценки.

Ключевые слова: альтернативная оценка; диагностический тест; квалификационный тест; тест на достижения; тест на зачисление; портфолио; журнал; экспертная оценка.

Introduction. Assessment is one of the most important and difficult parts of our jobs as teachers. It has much more other functions than just formally grading students` performance. Ideally, it should serve as a guide for both teachers and students to show their road to teaching and learning. As no single method or approach can meet the needs of all learners, different types of assessment can be the tools to assist students` awareness of how they are progressing and teachers` measuring effectiveness of their teaching approaches and materials. J. N. Norris says “Language assessment ... is much more than simply giving a language test; it is the entire process of test use. Indeed, the ultimate goal of language assessment is to use tests to better inform us on the

decisions we make and actions we take in language education” (2000, p45) Therefore, testing should not be separate from teaching, instead it should be a part of teaching or teaching itself to realize the functions J. M. Norris mentioned.

We see many teacher — trainings sharing the ideas and techniques about conducting lessons, classroom discipline or motivating learners, but very rarely observe teachers having training on assessment and test designing. This means despite so many important functions of assessment, it is usually overlooked. There are many issues and factors related to assessment that teachers should know and consider if they want to make their teaching effective and useful. As a teacher of the university, I have a number of observations related to assessment and test designing. When I conduct the lecture on the topic of assessment in the course of foreign language teaching methodology, many students mention that the tests they are having do not always follow the principles they have learnt in the lecture. They share their negative experiences in test-taking because of the quality of tests. Another issue is related to central orders about the form of examinations. Despite the innovations and introduction of new attitudes towards teaching, I consider teachers are not supported and encouraged enough to use variety of alternatives in language assessment, especially final examinations. They are limited to design written tests in the form of international proficiency tests. However, assessment may truly vary according to the course objectives and content. These two observations I have made inspire me to write on the current topic.

The purpose of the article lies in encouraging teachers to be aware of the subject, understand its value, differentiate different types and forms of assessment and set respective aims to test. Importantly, the author intends, through article, to compile various features and specifications of alternative tests and consequently help teachers to choose the most appropriate one for their teaching objectives and students` needs.

Since the government of Uzbekistan is making great efforts to make national education system responsive to international standards, developing assessment system is of great value. The more literate and competent teachers are in assessment, the more they can succeed in teaching and consequently, contribute to enhancing education system in the country. The use of alternatives in assessment is obviously essential components of international standards, which makes the issue actual. The novelty the article can bring is a compilation of some of alternative test types with their detailed description of features, which can help teachers to make right decisions about forms of assessment.

To research the issue and to achieve the aims set, *qualitative method* (by analyzing existing theories provided in available materials and sources and by using the author`s observations and practices related to the issue) will be used.

Main body. As one of the purposes of the article is to help teachers to set purposes for testing, we should mention about the types of assessment according to their functions. Two functions are commonly identified in the sources: formative and summative.

According to H. D. Brown (3), *formative* is a type of assessment evaluating the skills and competences of students with the goal of guiding them to continue that growth via appropriate feedback by teachers and necessary conclusions and learning by the student. Usually, all kinds of informal assessment carry out formative function. In comparison, *summative* assessment intends to gauge how well a student could accomplish objectives without making much focus on the way to future progress. The prime examples of summative assessment are final exams at the end of the course, general proficiency exams which typically involve evaluation (decision making). In terms of their importance in classroom, P. Black and D. William (2, 7–74) have researched and found that formative assessment was greater than summative assessment as the former provides more thorough information about students' progress levels to teachers. However, there is an issue related to students' misconception about aims of different continuous assessment, thus wrong attitude. In other words, many students tend to overrelax after midterm exams or review tests thinking they were for summative purposes only, which causes them to forget everything they have learnt. The challenge for teachers is to change that attitude among students and help them to transform test taking into learning experiences by gradually instilling formative quality of tests.

Another classification, which is logical continuation of previous grouping, is as follows: achievement, diagnostic, placement and proficiency tests.

Mainly representing summative functions, *achievement tests* are usually taken at the end of the course, unit, term etc. They check to what extent and degree the students learnt new knowledge or developed a particular skill; they check whether the course aims and objectives, set at the beginning, were realized. Alternatively, this type of test can serve as formative one as they can give feedback to both students (about their further decisions concerning study goals and habits) and teachers (about the changes and improvements they can bring to the content and teaching). The form and allotted time for achievement test can vary to infinite extent depending on the weight of objectives set for the test (3).

The main function of *diagnostic tests* is to make necessary conclusions about what skills of students need to be worked on and developed, and to give teachers essential information about what to include to the content of the respective curriculum. Therefore, we can consider this type of test formative.

Placement test, which can be taken both at the beginning and at the end of a particular course, carries out an administrative function. It places a student into a relevant level or section of a language curriculum or school. Placement test, for example, is taken at Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature (TSUUL) to select students with highest language competence and teach them using specific and more complex curriculum. The functions of placement tests may overlap with diagnostic ones as it also provides information about students' current ability and skills at the beginning of a course. Besides, achievement tests can also be used as placement test, i.e. the results

of final exams may decide which student will study in what kind of group. For instance, the students of Translation Faculty at TSUUL have been grouped into synchronic, scientific and literary translation directions according to the students' performance in speaking and writing final exams.

The test which checks general skills of a learner is called *proficiency test*. The main feature of this test is that they are not based on a particular course content and curriculum. Proficiency tests provide results in the form of single score divided into several subscores. The international exams like IELTS, TOEFL or Cambridge exams are examples of them. For instance, in IELTS there is an overall band score which is average of listening, reading, writing and speaking subscores. H.D. Brown (3) recommends language teachers not to design proficiency tests, instead to use one of commercially available proficiency tests for the reason that creating tasks for this type of test and validating them with research is time-consuming and costly.

H. D. Brown (3) mentions about another type of test as well — *aptitude test*. Being no longer common in application and used prior to the course, this type of test measures the capacity and general ability of an individual to learn a foreign language; and how successful the person can be in language learning in the future.

More vivid classification of these test types and their functions can be seen in the diagram below (*Figure 1*)

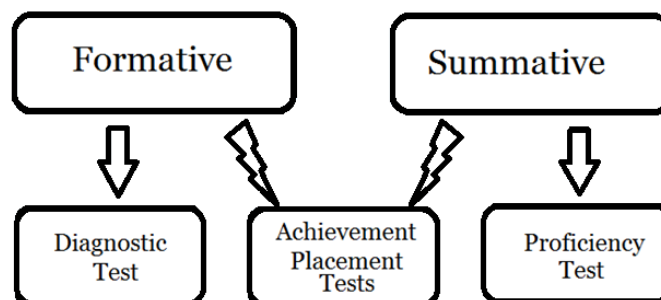
J. M. Norris (7, 41–45) in his article suggests some guidelines for teachers to make their assessment and testing purposeful and effective. They are 1) focusing on assessment, not simply tests; 2) clarifying the intended use of the test; 3) evaluating the outcome of assessment.

The first recommendation given by Norris has a direct link to the types of assessment discussed above. He claims that tests can be used in a number of intentions: to diagnose areas of learner need and sources of learning difficulties (diagnostic test); to make selection decisions for entrance into a particular program or educational place (placement test); to certify students have a particular standard of language level (proficiency test); to evaluate the extent of students' learning (achievement test). Language teachers' awareness of those functions of tests helps them to clarify which jobs the test should be accomplishing and choose the most appropriate one in accordance with the set goals.

Next recommendation concerns with how the test will be used in the classrooms and programs. Norris defines *intended test use* as interrelation between four components of assessment process: a) who uses the test; b) what information the test should provide; c) why the test is being used; d) what consequences the test should have.

Figure 1.

Test types and their functions



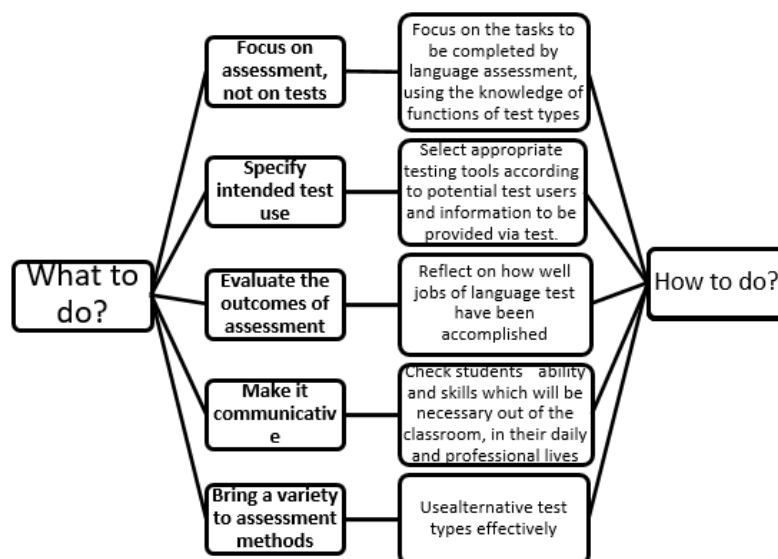
The third of recommendations, *evaluating the outcomes of assessment*, means reflecting on the questions and goals set before. It measures to what extent the tasks have been accomplished by answering the following questions: whether testing tools provided the appropriate amount and type of information to support interpretations; whether intended curriculum aims were achieved by using language test; and what the positive and negative consequences of using the language test were. Referring to the results of this reflection, teachers may decide what testing tools were effective and can be used further; which ones need improving; or which testing instruments cannot be and should not be used any more.

In addition to J. M. Norris' (7) suggestions, we can put forward the idea of considering *communicativeness* of the test. With the introduction of communicative approach to language teaching methodology, the features of it are being reflected in all components of language teaching including the objectives, content, tasks, activities etc. This means that assessment process should also represent how communicative particular alternative of testing is. This is directly related to the principle of authenticity in test designing, as making assessment communicative means "measuring students' ability to operate in a specified sociolinguistic situation with specified ease or effect, rather than testing how much of the language a test taker knows" (9, 92). A Similar approach was expressed by L. Bachman and A.S. Palmer (1, 9) saying "in order for a particular language test to be useful for its intended purposes, test performance must correspond in demonstrable ways to language use in *non-test situations*". In general the feature of communicativeness helps teachers to check students' not only awareness of the language, but also language competence; as language awareness is only about linguistic knowledge, while language competence includes extralinguistic factors such as discourse, pragmatic and cognitive.

Considering the demands of contemporary world and increased expectations of learners from the teachers, we should be able to offer a great *variety of assessment methods* rather than being limited with traditional forms of it. This is the fifth recommendation we are sharing in the article. Having been emerged in the 1990s, *alternative assessment* is believed to fill the gaps of standardized tests. The main contribution of this novel

concept is that it offers variety to language teaching preventing students' boredom and exam taking pressures. Any foreign language teacher is supposed to include alternative test types so that they could make students' learning exceptional, reflective, enjoyable, positive and therefore, effective.

Figure 2.
Guidelines to make assessment purposeful using J.M. Norris' suggestions



Since another aim of the article to define and describe several alternative assessment types to help EFL teachers select the most appropriate one, we need to discuss their common characteristics. With reference to H. D. Brown and T. Hudson (1; 6, 654–655), alternatives in assessment

- ✓ Encourage students to perform, create, produce and do something;
- ✓ Implement authentic contexts and simulations;
- ✓ Are nonintrusive in that they go beyond the day-to-day classroom activities;
- ✓ Create an opportunity for learners to be assessed on what they typically do in classroom;
- ✓ Apply tasks that provide meaningful instructional input;
- ✓ Involve both process and product based tasks;
- ✓ Trigger higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills;
- ✓ Aid students' reflection on their strengths and weaknesses;
- ✓ Are multiculturally influential when correctly administered;
- ✓ Guarantees assessment occurs using humanistic judgment, not computerized;
- ✓ Supports open disclosure of standards and rating criteria;
- ✓ Inspire teachers to demonstrate new instructional and assessment roles.

Commonly, portfolios, self- and peer assessment, conferencing, diaries, learning logs, teacher checklists, and observations are considered alternatives in assessment. Below specific features, some guidelines about how to use several of them will be discussed.

Portfolios

In communicative approach of language teaching, portfolio is one of the most popular and common alternatives in assessment. With reference to F. Genesee and J. A. Upshur (5, 99), a portfolio is “a purposeful collection of students’ work that demonstrates ... their efforts, progress and achievements in given areas”. Portfolios can include materials such as essays and compositions in draft form; reports, projects, and presentation outlines; audio and video recordings, personal reflections in a form of diary or journals; tests, test scores and written homework exercises; notes on lectures; self- and peer-assessments. Below pros and cons of portfolios compiled from various sources (3; 10)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Is a more vivid picture of in what stage of learning the students are	May become a pile of junk if not properly organized
Is useful linking between learning and assessment as develops reflective learning	Requires the teacher to provide detailed feedback and review, so not practical for classrooms with greater number of students
Engages students in assessment and supports student-teacher interaction	Can be time-consuming for teachers to check and assess
Is adaptable to different levels of assessment and kinds of materials	Students may not understand the purpose of the task, and therefore may think useless and daunting
Both individualises learning and encourages collaborative work	Can be subjective in assessment which makes measuring less reliable
A variety of sources of feedback — peers, self and tutors	Students may concentrate on presentations rather than actual content
High on validity, if the structure matches course learning outcomes	To agree on how to assess can be difficult

The advice on when we should select portfolio as a form assessment will be expressed by answering the following questions:

Who can it be used for?

It can be used for all level students and all age groups. However, tasks and papers making up portfolio are to be selected appropriately respectively to different levels and age-groups. It is not recommended for students who are having intensive courses, as it can be time — consuming for them. Portfolio is of more use for those who need *scaffolding* i.e ongoing support and feedback from their teachers until they make their learning stable and consistent.

What can be a part of portfolio?

More reflective and personalized written works and compositions are recommended to be included, as it can prevent plagiarism and encourage teacher-student written interaction, consequently creating better student-teacher rapport. Assessment checklists can also be used to help learners to track their progress.

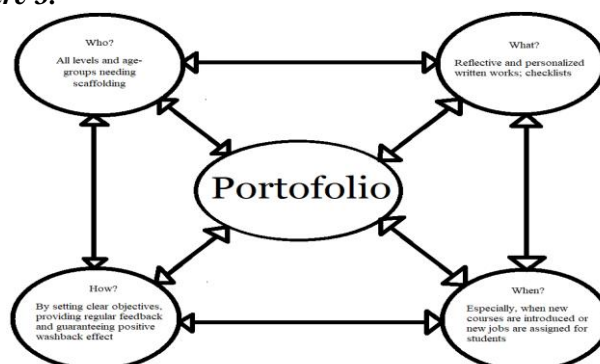
How to use it?

1. Make sure that their students, especially those who are doing it for the first time, understand the objectives of this task and value it.
2. Explain assessment criteria clearly and thoroughly right at the beginning and get their approval.
3. Provide their having more positive washback effect by focusing on achievements rather than learning gaps during the assessment
4. Do not use this alternative if you are not sure you will be able to review and give feedback regularly. This can demotivate students from completing the task.
5. Try to turn it into a voluntary job. Students should do it consciously without being forced.

When to use it?

Portfolio had better be given at the beginning of the course, not just several days or lesson prior to the end. Otherwise, the papers and submissions in it become fake and not authentic. It can be really useful when students are having a particular course or discipline for the first time. For instance, in Uzbek national curriculum, it is used for student-teachers who are having their teaching practicum. It helps them to reflect on their new experiences, challenges and skills gained during their initial teaching.

Figure 3.



Journals

Journals are accounts of learners' feelings, thoughts, impressions and attitudes towards a particular event, object, usually composed with almost no consideration of structure, form and accuracy (H. D. Brown, 2010). Main purpose and function of journals are to build a friendly rapport between a student (writer) and a teacher (reader), which in turn help the teachers to get introduced with their students in non-academic environment and be aware of learners' specific needs. This type of task highly encourages free writing and consolidates written communicative

skills. One thing teachers should keep in mind about using journals in teaching and assessment is that students should feel safe about sharing their ideas — teachers should assure their students that they are not going to be judged later.

Once in my early years of teaching, I used group journals with my pre-intermediate group and continued it until they finish upper-intermediate levels and leave that language schools. One student was supposed to record for a week — what they have learnt, what interesting events happened, how they spent their time together out of classroom etc. Then next student would do the same job next week. At the end, I asked them to finalise their journals with their wishes to each other or feelings about finishing the course. Looking back what they wrote years ago, they really felt positive and content, because they could notice to what extent (great) they have improved in language. We can say this was not only interaction between a single student or teacher, but a group communication, which recorded learning experiences, created a friendly atmosphere, fostered sense of community in the group.

Here is a sample of another experience with use of dialogue journals, tried during the period of quarantine with university students.

Figure 4.

Journal entry by Zuhra Rakhimjanova

Today I woke up late because last night I stayed up till 3 a.m. doing tasks. I didn't feel like having breakfast. But my mother told me off for not leading a healthy lifestyle and made me eat a boiled egg and cheese. Then I washed dishes and cleaned up a kitchen which is my least favorite of all housework. Frankly, I hate doing this kind of chores. Unlike other girls, I'm not into cooking and even fashion is of no interest to me. I would rather watch football for hours or read fiction instead.

Anyway, I finished what I was supposed to do and headed right back to my room. I had to submit midterm tasks online from subjects called Foreign language teaching methodology and Critical discourse. I decided to complete tasks from methodology first. It wasn't so challenging, but it did take me about two hours or more to submit it. To my mind, this quarantine enabled us to consider the benefits of online education and distance learning. I guess it is more comfortable as it is not time-consuming. I had to spend hours commuting to university and back before lockdown.

However, I really missed some of my friends. Being an introvert, I don't care if I stay home for months. But it really feels weird sometimes. Although all family members are gathered and we are spending more time together, I don't get along with them at times. But at the end of the day this, quarantine is also a gift and we should take the advantage of it. Hopefully, everything will be fine soon.

Teacher's response

This is an impressive piece of writing because you really communicate to the reader. The language sounds very

natural — by selecting appropriate vocabulary you can share what you feel and help the reader to visualize it. That's nice you feel safe about sharing your daily life and what you are like in family. It was very interesting to get to know you from non-academic side. ☺ However, sometimes you become a little bit formal with some words and structures. I advise you to read more fiction and watch movies to learn more natural daily expressions. Because at times it feels like I am reading an academic composition ☺. At the end of the day, I really liked your final point — your thoughts about quarantine. If you want to do an entry related to this one — you can make a dialogue to Zuhra before quarantine. What would previous Zuhra say to Zuhra who is staying at home now because of quarantine.

Here in the sample, teacher talks to a student and encourages further communication by opening a new discussion. When I gave this response, Zuhra was really inspired to write a new entry, probably because she felt heard by the teacher and found it interesting to discuss about an actual issue — quarantine.

So we can make conclusion about the characteristics of using journals in assessment.

- It is especially beneficial for groups newly set or when a new teacher starts teaching a particular group. Journals help students and teachers to better get to know each other, create social bonds between them and make learning friendly and non — academic
- Teachers should show that they are really interested to knowing what their students share and express by detailed and individual feedbacks; and finish it with unfinished tone using questions or opening interesting discussions. This turns journal entries into non-stop conversations.
- It is essential for readers (teachers) to stop themselves from correcting students' writing — they should not forget that process is important, not the product.
- Not very strict word limits can be set to prevent too long and too short answers and save teacher's time.

Although we have mentioned so many advantages of using journals in teaching, many scholars argue about its part in assessment. H. D. Brown (3) mentions ethical issues and issues related to practicality and reliability. He raises a question whether it would be ethically appropriate to evaluate students' performance according to the case when they open their inner-self. Moreover, as journals can be diverse in forms, it is difficult to set a certain assessment criterion. Solution to the problem could be not to spare more weight to journals in general assessment of the course to avoid unreliable and subjective evaluation.

Peer assessment

One of the other features of communicative approach is to encourage cooperative and collaborative learning. Peer assessment, on which students individually assess each other's

work referring to certain criteria, is an indispensable part of this group learning. A number of scholars showed their positions in terms of peer assessment. In particular, H. D. Brown and T. Hudson (3;6) think peer assessment makes students responsible for each other's destiny, encourages learner autonomy and increase motivation; while researchers such as W. Cheng & M. Warren, 2005; B. North (4; 8) consider this type of assessment subjective as learners can be too critical or praising about each other's work. I use peer — assessment in my writing classes at university and generally find it very effective and motivating. According to university curriculum, students are supposed to write one composition in two or three drafts (process — based approach). Peer assessment is usually used with first drafts to make them feel more confident and freer at the beginning. In order to facilitate their task, I usually prepare peer —assessment sheets with simplified questions of teacher's academic assessment criteria. Sometimes I assign specific roles for students. For example, one student checks an essay for only cohesion, another for grammar range and accuracy etc. This makes assessment very detailed and objective — the overall grade will not be influenced by one stronger or weaker part. In most cases, students are motivated to check each other's works as they can recognize their own problems or mistakes through peer's work; and can learn from better works of their friends. Main problems arisen during the assessment are lack of students' knowledge and in general English skills, incompetence in giving feedback and not understanding assessment criteria. Considering all the theories and practices mentioned earlier, we can conclude that peer assessment

- Supports learner autonomy and collaborative learning
- Engages students into assessment
- Creates an opportunity for peer and self-reflection
- Saves teacher's time

However,

- It can be problematic to use with lower — level students or multi-level classrooms
- Students may not feel confident and competent in checking others' works
- Subjectivity may not be always prevented — friends or enemy relationships may influence marking.

Conclusion. As mentioned earlier in the paper, assessment plays a predominant role in teaching. Particularly, as a result of common application of communicative approach in language teaching, the scholars in the sphere have been introducing novel and different (compared to pre-communicative approach period) concepts about language assessment. The article covered one of those issues — making assessment purposeful and selecting the right alternative test. Conclusions the author has made after studying and analyzing the issue are as follows:

➤ Setting the right objectives for assessing is highly important as it links teaching and evaluation. The aims of the conducted course and assessment should correlate to make learning meaningful, purposeful and effective. In order to develop

the competence of setting the right purpose, teacher ought to be aware of test types and their functions.

➤ Purposeful testing can be achieved by focusing on assessment, not on tests; identifying the intended use of the test; evaluating the outcome of assessment; making assessment communicative; and making evaluation methods various.

➤ Variety in assessment methods is, in turn, related to using alternatives in assessment. In general alternative test types are high in reliability but low in practicality. This means they can give more accurate results of students' achievements and knowledge but can be labor — intensive and time-consuming in terms of planning, checking and evaluating.

➤ The forms of alternative assessment discussed in the article (portfolios, journals and peer assessment) are characteristic of encouraging reflection, personalized learning and collaborative work; promoting learner autonomy; and building better student-teacher and student-student relations.

➤ Teachers using alternative assessment are supposed to be selective and careful about who to use it for, how to apply it; and why to choose it.

The research could further be developed by providing more empirical data based on experiments, survey results etc. The study of a particular alternative in assessment can be narrowed down into a specific skill or course. For example, the use of portfolios in the course of foreign language teaching methodology for university students is worth investigating, as it can give more detailed data about the status of alternative assessment in national context.

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