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TESTING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

At present a test is supposed to play a very useful and important role in foreign language teaching. It is a means to show both the students and the teacher how much the learners have learnt during a course. Tests can be accomplished at the beginning of the study year and at the end of it; the students can be tested after working on new topics and acquiring new vocabulary. Moreover, the students are to face the tests in order to enter a foreign university or reveal the level of their English language skills for themselves. So, tests can serve for different purposes and are unrelated, but they are sometimes quite common in their design and structure.

Thus, the goal of the present research is to investigate various types of test formats. According to some scholars (Thompson, 2001; Hughes, 1989; Alderson, 1996; Heaton, 1990; Underhill, 1991), there are four traditional categories or types of tests: proficiency tests, achievement tests, diagnostic tests, and placement tests.

Referring to Longman Dictionary of LTAL (106) diagnostic test is a test that is meant to display what the student knows and what s/he does not know. The diagnostic test displays the teacher a situation of the students' current knowledge. This is very essential especially when the students return from their summer holidays (that produces a rather substantial gap in their knowledge) or if the students start a new course and the teacher is completely unfamiliar with the level of the group. Hence, the teacher has to consider carefully about the items s/he is interested in to teach.

Another type of test we are intended to discuss is a placement test. Concerning Longman Dictionary of LTAL again (279-280) we can see that a placement test is a test that places the students at an appropriate level in a programme or a course. This type of test is also used to decide which group or class the learner could be joined to.

At first sight these two types of tests seem to be similar. However, they are different. A diagnostic test is meant for displaying a picture of the students' general knowledge at the beginning of the study year for the teacher to plan further work and design an appropriate syllabus for his/her students. Whereas, a placement test is designed and given in order to use the information of the students' knowledge for putting the students into groups according to their level of the language. Indeed, they are both used for teacher's planning of the course but their functions differ.

Another type of test is achievement test. According to Longman Dictionary of LTAL (3), an achievement test is a test, which measures a language someone has learned during a specific course, study or program. Here the progress is significant and, therefore, is the main point tested. There differentiate two usage types of achievement tests: formative and summative. The notion of a formative test denotes the idea that the teacher will be able after evaluating the results of the test reconsider his/her teaching, syllabus design and even slow down the pace of studying to consolidate the material if it is necessary in future. Notwithstanding, these reconsiderations will not affect the present students who have taken the test. They will be applied to the future syllabus design. Summative usage will deal precisely with the students' success or failure. The teacher will immediately can take up remedial activities to improve a situation.

The last type of test to be discussed is a proficiency test. Regarding Longman Dictionary of LTAL (292) proficiency test is a test, which measures how much of a language a person knows or has learnt. It is not bound to any curriculum or syllabus, but is intended to check the learners' language competence. TOEFL and ILES are examples of this test.

To sum it up we can claim that existing types of tests serve for different purposes. Moreover, they all are necessary for the teacher's work, except a proficiency test, for they could contribute to successful material acquisition by learners.