Chapter 5
Designing Achievement Tests for Language Learners Through Contemporary Technologies

Sibel Kahraman-Ozkurt
Pamukkale University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The chapter aims at giving insights to English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers on creating and designing achievement tests through digital tools for checking their student' progress and teaching/learning process. As language learners may have concerns and barriers regarding the assessment and testing issues, the administration of digital tools for that purpose is believed to contribute to both students' development by lowering their anxiety levels and accordingly teachers' future practices. Based on the feedback on students' performance gathered through digital tools, teachers and other stakeholders can find the opportunity to re-organize teaching materials, tasks, or the coursebooks. EFL teachers may also be provoked to use some other digital tools not included in that chapter by following the procedures in the activity plans for their future assessment practices.

INTRODUCTION

Tests have become commonly and popularly used language testing and assessment methods in the educational world. A test, at its simplest, can be defined as a method of measuring a person's ability or knowledge in a given domain (Brown, 2001).

There are many kinds of tests, each with a specific purpose and a criterion to be measured. Among all the kinds of the tests, achievement tests are the most common and popular ones that are related to classes, course units or the total curriculum. They can be applied to check whether the course objectives or unit outcomes of a lesson are satisfied following a period of instruction. Most of the language teachers tend to use achievement tests to simply give some test scores to their students or, more importantly, to detect the strengths or weaknesses of their learners regarding the achievement of the course objectives. Through the achievement tests, language teachers can rearrange the techniques, materials or activities they employ in their classes in line with the underlying principles of dynamic assessment.

Despite this popularity and usefulness of achievement tests, preparing quality test items requires some great efforts and elaboration on the side of the language teachers. Creating quality and dependable tests which are administrable within the given constraints and accurately measure what they aim to measure has been a popular topic of discussion among the test developers for years. Despite the ongoing discussions on how to create and structure valid, reliable and practical tests to measure language skills and components, language learners too often feel anxious and tense when taking achievement tests, and they may get disappointed when they cannot make the expected grade. Under the influence of such feelings, many language learners may refrain from giving answers to test questions or totally avoid taking tests. Therefore, language teachers need to find some alternative ways to deal with these negative affective factors while administering tests to their students. At that point, using some contemporary technological tools can be the simplest, or the most complicated for some language teachers, solution for overcoming the barriers of anxiety and inhibition.

The use of technology for language teaching and learning has been widely accepted as an inevitable practice in today's digital age. This necessity and importance of technology use have led many professionals or organizations to elaborate on some guidelines or frameworks for the effective use of technology in and out of the classroom. As one of these organizations, TESOL Technology Standards Project Team published TESOL Technology Standards Framework (Healey et al., 2008) to provide guidance to language teachers and learners for implementing technology rather than setting barriers or unrealistic expectations about it. As one of the goals in the technology standards for teachers, it is stated in the framework that language teachers apply technology in record-keeping, feedback, and assessment. They can evaluate and implement relevant technology to aid in effective learner assessment. Therefore, they need to demonstrate familiarity with a variety of forms of assessment that employ technology. According to the performance indicators of the framework, language teachers can use technological tools for diagnostic, summative and formative testing.

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