**The New Methodology in the English Language Assessment**

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Abstract

The article discusses the modern assessment methodologies in English language teaching. Despite having assessment benchmarks, significant challenges remain in organizing methodological efforts to measure the level of foreign language skills. The article aims to clarify the methodological approaches used in modern English language teaching assessments in higher education in Azerbaijan.

In recent years, the purpose and function of assessment have changed significantly. However, the assessment process that supports learning in education is consistently viewed as problematic. The level of preparation of university students and graduates hinders their ability to integrate smoothly into the global educational environment.

The data was collected from 24 enrolled students (13 girls and 11 boys) in the study's experiment, and the findings demonstrated the necessity of looking into viewpoints in the new assessment methodology. The university must offer specialized assessment instruction, which supports the quality of language assessment. Qualitative factors should be included in the mechanism of processing students' achievements. The article explains the differences between assessment and testing through various studies. The new approaches to the assessment methodology in English language instruction will be presented in this article.

**Keywords:** language assessment, methodology, assessment theories, approaches, testing

# Introduction

# The interest and need for the English language in higher education are growing daily. In modern times, for Azerbaijan to advance socially and economically by international standards and to thrive in global communication, it is crucial to effectively measure the English language proficiency and skills of students in higher education institutions against the requirements of the labor market (Carless, 2015). First, there is a significant focus on scientific research and studies assessing the quality of English language teaching in pedagogical higher education. Moreover, the assessment of English in education has benefited young people's participation in international communication, education abroad, and public, political, and sociocultural discussions. For this purpose, the pedagogical universities in Azerbaijan need a curriculum that supports the new assessment policy and assessment based on learning outcomes for English language assessment. The English language curriculum needs to be revised for assessing students’ language competencies. Findings show that the level of preparation of university students and graduates does not allow for their flexible integration into the global educational space. In this context, modern universities, as research institutions involved in both teaching and research, should prioritize evaluating the effectiveness of English language teaching methodologies across various fields (Angelianawati, 2018). Accurately assessing students' language skills requires a sound methodological approach. The effective application of English language assessment plays a crucial role in developing students’ essential language skills. These skills include effective listening, communication, fluent speech, original dialogue of interactions, concise interpretation of reading texts, and written communication. Therefore, assessment serves as a vital catalyst for the development of lifelong learning, acting as an effective tool that encourages students to engage in the learning process (Brown, 2019).

According to Green (2020) “a*ssessment”* can provide you with a clear vision of your present level of competence and assist you in determining areas in which you may need to improve your language skills.

Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Yoshioka (1998) state that the process of achieving specific goals in language programs and classrooms is known as language assessment. Using language testing instruments, first, it must be methodically collected for *language assessment*.

Assessment, as defined by Winna and Sabarun (2023), is the process of tracking student learning and is employed in education to track and forecast student success. The process of assessment, which primarily establishes the degree of language acquisition, considers the quality component.

Thus, it should be defined that “*Language assessment is gathering data to support conclusions about an individual's language-related knowledge, skills, or abilities*.”

Teachers, academics, and practitioners are exploring a range of issues related to the assessment of English language proficiency and skills (Herrera, Macías, 2015; Nazari 2012). A range of methodological approaches, as well as fresh perspectives from linguistic and psychological paradigms, are being explored in scholarly research. As in general education in Azerbaijan, assessment procedures that support learning are observed in higher education institutions, where, despite much research, traditional pen-and-paper examinations are increasingly used to measure students' proficiency in foreign languages.

The task of choosing or creating language assessments for their classes and programs frequently falls on language teachers. However, with the growing number of language testing tools, methods, and practices available, it can be difficult to determine which testing options are best suited for a certain language education setting. Data shows that students provide more feedback, including more helpful comments, in a collaborative style. Additionally, most students find that providing feedback in pairs alleviates some anxiety about individually commenting on their peers' writing (Brown, 2019; Alshuraidah and Storch, 2019; Short, 1993). These choices include examinations that are different in scope and structure from the well-known options, such as multiple choice, matching, true-false, and fill-in-the-blank tests; cloze and dictation procedures; essay exams; and oral interviews.

Assessment, according to Hattie and Clarke (2019) aids students in understanding what *"excellence"* is, taking ownership of their language development, and planning their progress. It also helps teachers and students stay focused on the goal of learning. Furthermore, this makes it abundantly evident that learning and assessment are fully interwoven processes. According to Hattie's analysis, feedback is a potent instrument that raises student achievement. The instructors must explain how to modify the gains obtained in language knowledge and proficiency, explaining the difference between assessment and testing (Nazari, 2012; Hughes, 2020).

Regarding some theoretical perspectives, (Black and Wiliam, 1998) assessment and testing are on the same level, with only the testing portion being carried out. As Brown claims, assessment is a continuous process that involves several different tasks and activities. Teachers unconsciously evaluate their students' development whenever they answer a question, express an opinion, or try out a novel idea or framework. It is a vital method that may be used to gauge how well a learning process is working. Assessment findings may serve as the basis for teacher evaluation of the learning environment in the classroom. Language tests are tools or processes used to collect specific types of data, usually related to pupils' language proficiency. Different formats, lengths, item types, scoring criteria, and media can all be found in tests. Based on these traits and the data each one offers, we can distinguish between different kinds of language tests (Hughes, Hughes, 2020; Green, 2020).

# Method

By reading and evaluating material from sites, theories, journals, and studies that are specifically pertinent to the research subject, experimental work has been implemented during research. The experiment was primarily conducted using the qualitative method.

Essential finding the different language assessment methods utilized in EFL classes was one of the study's objectives. Reading and researching a range of relevant sources and articles, conducting survey analysis, interviews, and observation classes were used as a qualitative method in the experiment. Evaluating students’ activities and data sources, the literature review was used as a technique for data collection in this study.

# Result and Discussion

The results of the study demonstrated that the theoretical underpinnings of language evaluation serve as the framework for its methodical application.

The results showed that English language proficiency is not being evaluated to the appropriate degree for university requirements. The reason for this is that the evaluation criteria were not created with the learning objectives in mind. Despite the existence of language-level textbooks, the methodological effort in assessment is unimpressive. It was discovered that educators view evaluation as a form of testing. However, their basic understanding of evaluation theories provides them with the foundation to conduct this task poorly. Assessment is viewed by both teachers and students as a component of exams. It is impossible to gauge the degree of linguistic proficiency due to inadequate methodology support.

Furthermore, according to assessment theories, the only cognitive skills that may be developed in English classes are linguistic skills. The students’ sociocultural, teamwork, and communication skills are not well developed due to a lack of evaluation criteria for doing tasks and activities. Teachers have very little vision of the purpose of assessment theories. They view assessments as tests and only take them seriously when they are used in the examination process.

Students were surveyed on the fundamentals of assessment, and it was discovered that they mostly understood assessment as the outcome of various linguistic tests during exams for studying theories with repeated questions rather than as a product of daily activities.

The experiment's observations and interviews produced encouraging findings. Teachers and students were given assessment tasks and activity samples based on the learning outcomes. Alternative assessment techniques, as well as assessment activities were explained to teachers. In contrast to the first diagnostic test results, the final test results' successful answers are shown in the table. Interesting facts and concepts regarding the function of evaluation activities have previously been developed.

1. **Assessment of language skills**

Achieving the desired level of English language skills reflects a complete mastery of the language's pedagogical features and the practical application of theoretical knowledge.

According to Gardner (2012), Kendeou, Broek, Helder, and Karlsson (2014), effectively applying English language assessments helps develop essential student skills, including effective listening, critical thinking, analyzing, and problem-solving skills. The quality of English language teaching is measured by the accurate mastery of its developmental aspects and the monitoring of the progress of learning activities.

Herrera and Macías (2015) assert that the evaluation of student performance empowers qualified educators to make precise and well-informed choices that enhance the teaching-learning process. An integrated approach to learning must include relevant and high-quality evaluation for learning to improve student learning.

The assessment of English language skills indicates a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical features of the language, as well as how theoretical knowledge is applied in practice.

*Statement of problem*

* Due to a poor monitoring mechanism in place to determine students' level of English proficiency, there is less objectivity in assessing their knowledge;
* The rote test methodology, which is most frequently used in foreign language assessments, is used to deliver exams, and this approach to assessing students' knowledge does not align with the learning objectives;
* There are no English language assessment standards in higher education; the assessment principles are seen as ineffective in the process;
* There are various ways to assess methodologies; therefore, the lack of methodological norms and resources for educators created problems in this field;
* The main technique employed in pedagogical universities to teach is the creation of theoretical material based on questions meant to reinforce lecture and seminar subjects and in very rare cases, test samples made on paper;
* A student's performance in a foreign language at university is determined by the results of the final exam, and tests that assess students' English language proficiency are not reliable, and their findings are represented negatively.

The issue of the general education level has been the primary focus of local research, and numerous guidelines and recommendations about new assessment methods have been produced. As a result of this work, there is currently very little research on the methodology of English language assessment in higher educational institutions, and the mechanism of the continuous process, which evaluates students' language knowledge and skills based on learning outcomes, is still in its infancy (Ronan, 2015).

* 1. **Theories in language assessment**

As a result, the demands of the English language learning and assessment field necessitate a deeper comprehension of the subject and the analysis of theoretical approaches from various views. The assessment concept in language teaching is the only way to measure the interpretation of the theoretical essence of science to meet the requirement that certain language skills be at an appropriate level, which is another goal of language domains. Three viewpoints on evaluation are linked to the *"behaviorist," "cognitive," and "constructivist"* orientations in international literature. The evaluation of language proficiency in British schools occasionally aligns with the *"behaviorist," "constructivist," "socio-cultural," or "communicative approach"* theories.

* 1. **Behaviorist theory in assessment**

According to behavior theorists Skinner (1988), and Thorndike (1905), behavior modification emerged as a prominent theoretical approach in the 1970s when numerous contemporary teachers were being trained. Since then, it has been incorporated into curricula and everyday practice. According to this notion, the degree of behavior was also determined by professional language skills. These views held that the learning environment played a decisive role, that conditioned reactions to outside stimuli were used, and that praise, positive punishment, and incentives were effective strategies. Behaviorists use techniques that measure observable behavior, like exam performance, to gauge the extent of learning. Behaviorist teaching approaches have worked best when there is a *"reliable"* answer or content that is simple to learn (Carless, 2015).

* 1. **Cognitivism theory in assessment**

According to cognitive theory (Malik S., 2021), language skills are evaluated based on superficial thoughts, information, and processes, and there is a broad cognitive system with a taxonomic structure that includes mechanisms, changes, and taxonomic structures over deep structures, schemas, and so forth. Cognitive testing for language skills, which is also known as a cognitive screening test or cognitive assessment, investigates mental function issues and demonstrates how the brain processes knowledge through thought. Therefore, cognitive assessment gives a profile of a person's learning strengths and challenges because it offers a controlled snapshot of their current performance.

* 1. **Constructivism theory in assessment**

Constructivism theory in assessment is based on students' active participation. Students actively participate in their education under the constructivist concept. The five phases of this methodology are *application, evaluation, explanation, participation, and discovery* during assessment*.* The instructor serves more as a facilitator, assisting students in creating and assessing their learning (Skinner 1988). In this instance, the instructor pushes students to read, comprehend, forecast, clarify, and use language to support and defend their beliefs. In this regard, the constructivist method, which emphasizes student-centered interaction, contradicts the conventional teacher-centered method. According to Malik (2021), the constructivist method of evaluation is formative as opposed to summative. Its goal is to raise the standard of student learning, not to offer proof for student evaluation or grading. Assessment must take into account the unique requirements and traits of the science subject, teachers, and students.

* 1. **Sociocultural learning theory in assessment**

Sociocultural learning theory in assessment can help to address the difficulties in achieving learners’ thinking and assessment for learning as a teaching method. The social-cultural learning theory developed by psychologist Albert Bandura (1995) describes how students pick up new behaviors and abilities by interacting with others in their environments and observing them. Bandura highlighted how crucial modeling, imitation, and observation are to the learning process.

The test used in the assessment of cultures is based on the study of multicultural information. This type of test covers social behavior and conventions, legislation, customs, rituals, language, values ​​and beliefs, arts, and cuisine of English-speaking peoples. The main goal of this assessment is to use standardized assessments in communication and see them as cultural artifacts. The exchange model of assessment provides a way to provide self-directed assistance where social learners contribute their networking, interpersonal skills, and local knowledge.

* 1. **Communicative approach theory in assessment**

The communicative language assessment method firmly supports the idea that language is a dynamic instrument of communication and highlights the necessity of evaluating language learners according to their capacity to participate in authentic linguistic exchanges in the target language. Berns' synopsis of the eight CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) principles in evaluation is used by Savignon (2002):

1. The foundation of language evaluation is the idea that language is a means of communication; Speaking or writing helps speakers convey meaning and accomplish a particular goal;
2. Assessment of language use and development includes diversity;
3. During evaluation, competence is relative rather than absolute;
4. Language varieties can serve as examples for instruction and learning;
5. By analyzing fluency and cultural perspectives, students' communication skills are influenced by their culture;
6. Process evaluation is open to a variety of approaches and procedures;
7. Language evaluation is linked to proficiency in understanding and producing texts, interacting with people, and expressing thoughts;
8. Throughout formative and summative assessments, learners should exhibit linguistic fluency in completing tasks for a range of objectives (Msosa, Bruce, Crouch, 2021).

A test that asks students to finish an authentic task—one that accurately reflects what they would encounter in the real world - is known as a communicative test. These tasks may include speaking, writing, and reading assignments on the test

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## 2.2. Figures and Tables

***Table1. Students respond by having information about assessment activities in English classes***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| № | Respondents | No information | Little information | More information | A lot of information |
| 1 | Boys (11) | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 2 | Girls (13) | 1 | 2 | 6 | 4 |

The table below lists the key elements of the study's assessment guide, which describes the domains of university-level language assessment. The thorough manual that will be created in these areas should be created using suitable techniques and support efficient English language learning (table 2).

***Table 2. Components of Language Assessment***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assessment theories | Learning outcomes |
| Language domains | Linguistics, cognitive, constructive, social-cultural, communicative approach |
| Formative assessment | Ongoing process: language tasks and activities |
| Summative assessment (Testing) | Final results, quick responses |

Then, by assessment theories, the proper evaluation of language proficiency was investigated, and the provided chart allowed for a balanced to a certain extent comparison of students' linguistic knowledge with other domains. As a result of the research, an interesting assessment guide prepared jointly with teachers was presented to the university, and at the same time, alternative assessment methods for assessing language skills, such as role-playing games, case studies, debates, reading aloud, schematic reading, table writing, and essay writing, were tested, and assessment criteria prepared for each activity were presented (picture 3).

***Picture 3. Theory-based evaluation of students’ language skills***

The chart's findings demonstrated that if candidates' English language proficiency matches the learning objectives, it is simple to assess their language proficiency at the university level. The study also demonstrated that evaluation is an ongoing process. It takes real-world tasks and activities to acquire language abilities by the theoretical framework.(1)

**Conclusion.**

Thus, the main goals of this study are to give a general overview of language assessment and to list the many methodical ways of language evaluation that are employed in English language instruction and learning.

Thus, the study was able to provide a brief explanation of the evaluation procedure used in Azerbaijani pedagogical universities to determine the English language's potential. The main purpose of the article was to determine the role of new theories and approaches in the field of assessment in the achievement of learning outcomes. The functions of several intriguing approaches in assessment were made clear by the references analyzed in the article. The assessment serves distinct objectives from testing and the use of contemporary tests in the development of English language proficiency. An efficient method in the process is the selection and identification of appropriate language test instruments, their application, and the assessment of their volume to complete language assessment tasks (Huges, 2020). The results and discussions demonstrated that studying English at the university level in a more comprehensive way is a crucial step and that using assessment guidelines to address this issue is extremely helpful.

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