

# Testing of Language Abilities among EST Students: CLT Approach

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**Abstract** - The aim of the present paper is to help the students of EST (English for science and technology) improve their language abilities. Language testing is as important as language teaching itself. Tests make the teachers and syllabus makers enabled to find out the required objectives and materials for teaching-learning. Low expertise in English language or lack of communication skills is a hindrance to effective education and employability. Communicative language testing (CLT) approach is more helpful and suitable for assessment of learners' language abilities.

**Index Terms** - CLT Approach. ESP, EST, Language Abilities, Testing.

## INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact, testing of language abilities and skills are crucial. Testing is an indispensable component of instruction as it gives substantial knowledge about the development and achievement of learner's challenges and deals with the ways of learning and levels of anxiety. Effective teaching and testing are the two inseparable sides of a single coin. Testing is a preordained component in the course of language teaching and learning. Language testing is as important as language teaching itself. Tests enable the teachers and syllabus makers innovate the whole teaching and learning process by introducing new strategies. That's how it is possible to find out the required objectives and materials for teaching-learning.

Language testing is viewed as a necessary factor in language teaching, because teaching and learning process cannot be achieved unless it is tested. Tests ought to be conducted in order to ascertain the nature and state of the learners' capability, and the outcomes are the just source; they provide imperative thoughts

and ideas which are regarded as the corrective methods to be continued further as a reliable and trustworthy course of action, in the process of language teaching.

To measure the teaching-learning process in general, appropriate language test batteries ought to be required and such type of tests exhibit a reasonable image of the efficacy and utility of the particular language teaching methods. If a particular teaching method is not tested by consistent test batteries and verifiably viewed with the grades demonstrated from the students reactions, such teaching method would not be viewed as reliable and useful for language teaching.

Tests evaluate the learners' development and achievement as well as the effectiveness of the teaching materials and methods used. Besides, tests enable the teachers and the general public to distinguish students and rank them considering their achievements. Consequently, Madsen (1983) asserts, "Tests can provide insight into ways that we can improve the evaluation process itself... Tests... can benefit students, teachers, and even administrators by confirming progress that has been made and by showing how we can best redirect our future efforts" (p.5).

## RATIONALE

In the present scenario, majority of the engineering graduates in India are grappling to meet the needs and demands of the employers, on account of lack of English language abilities and communication skills at workplace. Some recent survey reports, like NASSCOM and Aspiring Minds, reveal that approximately ninety seven percent of the engineering graduates are unable to speak English that is most important for their career in software and corporate industry.

Moreover, the reports show that low expertise in English language or lack of communication skills has been considered a hindrance to effective education and entry in to the job market and it then becomes a stumbling block for the accomplishments at workplace. It is the major problem that has been recognized at national and international levels. In this regard, learners, teachers and syllabus makers ought to consider that English expertise is a significant prerequisite for employment success. So, the present paper is intended to help the students of engineering and technology understand the present situation, in order to improve their language abilities and get groomed to meet the current industry-demands and employers' requirements

#### ENGLISH FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

English for science and technology (EST) is an offspring of the larger area of English for Specific Purposes showing some fundamental features of ESP. It highlights focused and practical learning of English; and its course design is based on the learners' communicative needs. It primarily deals with students of higher education and the learning of English plays a pivotal role in achieving academic success and also in succeeding excaadingly well with the career advancement. It's also useful for carrying out research work. As indicated by Lowe (2009), "EST is a style of writing as a result of the development of science and technology".

Conversely, in the area of science and technology, words are utilized distinctively and have certain exceptional meanings not quite the same as what they are usually seen and understood. It is clear from the study that technical English is, to some extent not the same as English for General Purpose. Therefore, it is vital for stakeholders in science and technology to comprehend the features and to utilize them in their works of writing. As the language in EST is more specific, EST can assist the stakeholders better, in portraying, deciphering and clarifying the various strides in the technical process.

Science and Technology is an area with its own remarkable language, having its own specific English which is actually referred to as English for Science and Technology (EST); it is a sort of English utilized in publications of science and technology, research papers, textbooks, scientific reports and academic

discourses and so on. Therefore, the structures in EST are firmly coordinated and its content is very particular. EST is utilized to transfer technical data, but it does not demonstrate any feelings or sensibilities.

#### TESTING OF LANGUAGE ABILITIES

Testing of language abilities means the testing of all the four language skills- LSRW as well as other language aspects such as, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and so on. To test a student's ability, the test batteries identified with each one of the four skills of language become significant. Test batteries can be created to test both the active and passive modes. During the time of production and practice, the active abilities are upheld by the passive abilities which are sustained by productive abilities.

In India, it is obvious that universities and colleges introduce different curriculums, syllabuses and methodologies. Furthermore, they do not follow any standard language testing system to test the language abilities uniformly, for example, ELTS (English Language Testing System). There have been some standardized English language proficiency tests or examinations designed and used globally such as: TOEFL, IELTS, PTE, TOEIC, BEC, etc.

In India, students learn English as a second language because they belong to various states with different mother tongues. Indeed, even one state does not follow any uniform testing system for testing language skills. No testing devices or testing instruments are assumed and followed evenly. Language instructors are the test designers and they design the test batteries as per the requirements. It is evidently learnt from the test papers of different colleges and universities that different kinds of test papers are prepared and used to test the proficiency of the second language learners.

#### KINDS OF LANGUAGE TESTS

As indicated by Carroll (1968), test is psychological or educational; it is a method or tool designed to draw out certain performance from which one can make inferences about certain qualities of an individual. In language setting, a test is intended to quantify and evaluate learners' language ability as per various characteristics (Hughes, 2003). Bachman and Palmer (1996) state the advantages of tests by expressing that

a test is helpful when it has validity, inter-activeness and reasonableness as well as the measuring characteristics such as: reliability and validity.

Reliability: An essential feature of test is being reliable. Reliability is characterized as the degree to which a questionnaire, test, watching or any evaluating instrument generates similar outcomes on repetitive tryouts. Reliability has three features such as: equivalence, stability and internal consistency (Miller, 2005).

Validity: It is another imperative feature of test and it is characterized as the degree to which the tool measures what it indicates to measure. A test is supposed to be valid when it quantifies what it intends to quantify. There are various forms of validity such as: content validity, face validity, predictive validity, construct validity, factorial validity, concurrent validity, convergent validity and divergent.

Tests are fundamentally two types such as: written and oral. Written tests are the well known testing devices in educational institutions across the world while the oral tests have limited scope. Furthermore, language tests are comprehensively grouped into two kinds as testing abilities and testing knowledge of content, such as: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) and other sub-skills like comprehension, jargon or vocabulary, grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling and so on. Conversely, there are various kinds of tests to find out student's knowledge in language like: Proficiency Test, Achievement Test, Aptitude Test, Placement Test, and Diagnostic Test.

#### NEED OF COMMUNICATIVE TESTING

A focal precept of communicative language testing is that the assignments are intended to address genuine activities that help the students to get experience in authentic situation, apart from the classroom. In this context, Brown (2005) recognizes five necessities that make up what is to be known as a communicative test. They are: meaningful communication, authentic situation, unpredictable language input, creative language output and integrated language skills.

- Meaningful communication: it means the test has to be designed for meaningful communication to students; it should fulfil their own necessities; it ought to encourage and activate language helpful

for students. The use of genuine situations can improve the probability that meaningful communication will be accomplished.

- Authentic situation: communicative test has to provide learners the chance to meet and make use of the objective language in authentic situations receptively and productively in order to demonstrate their language ability.
- Unpredictable language input: it is the way that in all real circumstances it is generally difficult to anticipate what speakers will say; this usual method of communication ought to be duplicated in a communicative test.
- Creative language output: actually language input is mostly based on one's preparation of language to reply to the question.
- Integrated language skills: a communicative test will draw out the students' utilization of language abilities in an integrated way; it is similar to the real life situation or authentic communication. (Brown, 2005, p. 21)

#### COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TESTING

Currently, as the communicative language teaching approach is extensively used in the ELT classrooms, there has been an augment in consciousness and research on communicative tests employed to assess the learners' language ability. Communicative language testing is aimed to make available the teacher with information regarding the learners' language ability to show in the target language in a particular context. In this regard, test makers have to consider key principles and characteristics in view of designing tests. Regarding the use of communicative language testing, a few reviews disclose that this kind of test might be challenging to the test creators. However, there is an obvious and manifested disparity between the practice of teaching and the mode of testing.

The aim of communicative language tests is to quantify language learners' ability to use language in real life situations. Communicative tests, including the four language skills (LSRW) are arranged with an emphasis on communicative competence. As indicated by Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence includes linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (knowledge of verbal and

non-verbal communicative strategies) (p. 4). It is necessary to recognize the communicative competence model as it is valuable for creating communicative language tests; and furthermore, it includes forming test goals and considering the impacts of the test on instruction and learning. Related to communicative language testing, some other framework has come up from test development study carried out at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). As per Bailey (1998), the research studies by Canale and Swain (1980), Swain (1984), Green (1985) and Hart, Lapkin and Swain (1987) are documented in which the authors and researchers have established four principles to design communicative language tests.

Start from somewhere is the first principle for designing communicative tests which should be based upon theoretical and practical starting points, both of which should be clearly articulated. The investigation of Katsumasa (1997) and Wesche (1983) showed a concurrence with this assertion by affirming that when making the test, test creators should state cautiously what the test takers to carry out when they utilize the objective language in a particular setting; it implies that test creators should understand what they need to test. Then, test creators can build up scales and criteria in appraisal strategies to gauge precisely the expressed highlights of test takers' performance.

The second principle is Concentration on content to design a communicative language test. The aim of the OISE group of researchers in creating communicative evaluation instruments was to estimate factual communication, which is a significant part in creating evaluation undertakings, and to give something for test takers to talk and consider. The content here alludes to topics as well as tasks that will be carried out. Suitable content matches or accommodates students' or test takers' age, proficiency level, interests and objectives. As per Carroll (1983), "the language tasks, our learners are expected to perform in their future jobs, will guide us with the tasks we will set them in our tests." (p. 37). Moreover, tasks ought to be developed with the consideration of the test takers' pertinent necessities. The assignments should intend to be genuine and have clear reference in actuality.

The third one, Bias for best is to design communicative tests to draw out the best achievable presentation from the testees. This implies that test creators should remember that they ought to make a test that can

develop test takers' presentation at their best. This principle is also endorsed with Brown's work in making the test. As indicated by Brown (2003), biased for best is "a term that goes little beyond how the student views the test to a degree of strategic involvement on the part of student and teacher in preparing for, setting up, and following the test itself" (p. 34). Swain (1984) stated that in order to make an appraisal strategy which is biased for best, test creators and teachers ought to give students proper review to assist them with well-preparedness and ready for the test; in addition, they have to recommend procedures that will be advantageous, and develop the test in a manner that it is unassumingly difficult to the best students or test-takers, but the weaker ones will not be overpowered (as cited by Brown, 2003, p. 34).

The fourth principle is Work for washback. It implies that communicative tests should be overtly intended to achieve positive washback. To get positive washback, test creators ought to make clear scoring criteria that will be presented to the instructors as well as testees. Furthermore, course goals and test-content have to be taken into consideration in view of encouraging positive washback.

Communicative language testing is unique in relation to other testing forms since they have an assortment of distinct highlights. All together for the communicative language test to decide how the students will respond in an authentic circumstance outside the test and the classroom, the test ought to reflect that circumstance exactly as much as achievable. Consequently, the test will be high in its authentic substance and specific setting with tasks mirroring the language and abilities students have to perform in authentic situations.

Communicative language testing aims to test reliable and genuine abilities as opposed to testing what is not liable to occur in authentic situations. In addition, real life assignments ensure that the tests can get high face validity. Morrow (1981) stated that tests' face validity is more imperative than their reliability.

Moreover, as indicted by Morrow (1981), there are imperative viewpoints that communicative language testing ought to mirror including typical conversation, opportunities to start, and unpredictability. Communicative language testing must evaluate the students' expertise to carry out authentic circumstances qualitatively (Morrow, 1981). Morrow also disclosed that students' responses to the test ought to be evaluated for the purpose how they take after

those of native speakers; and tests ought to uncover how students perform utilizing the language.

#### CONCLUSION

Finally it is to say that the present paper can help the students of EST (English for science and technology) know the current position of career opportunities; and they can improve their language abilities.

Fundamentally communicative tests, concerned with how language is utilized in authentic communication, are aimed to find out how the learners are able to utilize language in authentic situations. Therefore, communicative language testing (CLT) approach is recommended as it is more helpful and suitable for assessment of learners' language abilities.

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