ASSESSING QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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He who dares to teach must never cease to learn.
Richard Henry Dann.

Abstract
Quality assurance in teaching depends on a number of factors, and teacher’s role is indisputable. The central factors in quality of teaching and learning are learner self-assessment, monitoring progress, success and accomplishment, and evaluation of teaching quality. This paper addresses these factors of assessing quality in teaching and learning Language for Specific Purposes. Learner questionnaires and interviews are employed in the research. This paper offers some recommendations for quality enhancement in teaching and learning a foreign language.

Key words: Quality of Teaching and Learning, Language for Specific Purposes, Assessment and Self-Assessment, Success Experience, Evaluation of Teaching.

Introduction
Mykolas Romeris University shares with universities worldwide a commitment to high quality teaching and learning and highlights the maintenance and ongoing development of quality teaching and learning. Academic staff and students are engaged in teaching and learning which meet professional needs, are critical and innovative, make appropriate use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), use learning experience and resources to support good teaching and learning practice, and, finally, monitor and evaluate teaching and learning outcomes to maintain quality.
Responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning lies with university Faculties and Departments that ensure quality in teaching and learning. Quality assurance in teaching resides with teachers whose role in enhancing learning is indisputable.

This paper addresses issues of quality assurance in teaching and learning Language for Specific Purposes (LSP).

**Literature review**

The literature on effective teaching in higher education claims that there is no single or straightforward way of teaching people to learn. Learners state that learning proceeds in a variety of teaching styles and settings by means of varies strategies.

Some features of effective teaching were summarized in [1]. According to this source, effective teaching a) is focused on learning outcomes for students in the form of knowledge, skills and comprehension, b) is coherent in the integration of objectives with teaching procedures and assessment, c) ensures the clear communication to students of requirements in which they can achieve their potential, d) promotes the development of co-operative learning with peers, e) encourages learners to develop autonomous learning skills by providing various tasks, f) respects students’ responses and views, g) encourages learners’ feedback on teaching, h) takes into account students’ self-assessment, i) monitors learners’ progress through formal assessment, i.e. testing.

Good teaching enhances many aspects of learning. However, effective personal learning also depends on learners’ attitudes, values and responses. Students are teachers’ partners in the educative process and are largely responsible for their own learning. Students who understand goals and standards are likely to have better learning outcomes.

Effective adult learning has the following features [2]: a) it is autonomous and self-directed, b) it is fostered by cooperation and interaction with peers, c) it has a lifelong orientation, d) it values individuality and person’s interests, e) it is critical of what is being studied.

The central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning is assessment. In higher education [1], well designed assessment sets clear students’ expectations, establishes a reasonable workload, and provides opportunities for students to conduct self-monitoring and receive feedback.

Assessment in higher education must serve a number of purposes: guide students approaches to study, provide learners with feedback on their progress, judge their performance and guarantee academic standards.

Assessment criteria and standards influence the quality of students’ learning. American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) has formulated 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning [2]. The most important are: a) assessment of student learning begins with educational values...
and serves for educational improvement, b) assessment is most effective when learning is understood as multidimensional and revealed in ongoing performance, c) assessment requires attention to outcomes and the experiences that lead to those outcomes, d) assessment works best when it is ongoing, e) assessment fosters wider improvement when the educational community is involved in it, f) assessment makes a difference when involves useful issues that students care about, g) assessment is most likely to lead to improvement if changes in learning are promoted.

Until 1995 British Universities used the method for Quality Assessment that contained three categories: Excellent, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory. Since 1995 assessment has been made by grading teaching and learning on a scale of one to four: one = low, four = high. Teaching Quality Assessment results include [3]: 1) Curriculum Design, Content and Organization, 2) Teaching, Learning and Assessment, 3) Student Progression and Achievement, 4) Students Support and Guidance, 5) Learning Resources, 6) Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

External Quality Assessment is conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency, which since 2002 has moved to a system of periodic Institutional Audits [4]. Institutional Audits include quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures.

Internal assessment can be carried out by lecturers within each Faculty. The ideas and strategies in the assessing student learning support three interrelated objectives for quality in students assessment in higher education, namely: 1) effective approaches to learning, 2) measuring learning outcomes validly and reliably, 3) appropriate grading that protects academic standards [1].

According to Mohanan’s article [5], teaching at the university level reveals the following characteristics: ‘teaching is the activity of lecturing to students, teaching is the activity of transferring a body of knowledge to students, and teaching is the activity of causing students to learn something, i.e. the activity of facilitating learning’. Both lecturing and knowledge transfer are important components of learning process. However, ‘if the teaching activities do not result in learning, there has been no teaching. Likewise, if the learning is lacking in quality, the teaching is unsuccessful’.

Learner self-assessment helps learners think about their own progress and find ways of changing, adapting and improving. ‘Many language learners, particularly the most successful language learners, regularly engage in self-assessment as part of their learning’ [6].

The most common self-assessment techniques are descriptions, counseling sessions, self-monitoring, self-grading, rating, questionnaires and surveys. Self-assessment may be performed on either documented by a teacher / students or non-documented levels. Descriptions and questionnaires are usually presented in the form of documented materials, while monitoring and rating data do not have to be documented [7].
The motives for introducing self- and peer-assessment are varied and usually include the practical impossibility for teachers otherwise keeping effective track of all their students’ changing learning needs. Further motives include recognition of self- and peer-assessment as essential components of successful learning beyond teaching institutions, and the aim to make students more responsible for their own learning, through developing reflective learning habits [7]. In other words, self-assessment enables students to monitor their own progress from their own work, and peer-assessment helps to improve learning and to develop social and cooperative skills.

Self- and peer-assessment should be integrated into language courses for learning purposes because: 1) self-assessment is a prerequisite for a self-directed learner, 2) it can raise learners’ awareness of language, effective ways of learning and their own performance and needs, 3) it increases motivation and goal orientation in learning, 4) in language learning, learners’ efforts and beliefs can only be assessed through self-assessment, 5) it can reduce the teacher’s workload [8].

Teacher evaluation is a complex process and includes a series of activities and actions. Teachers have to be evaluated as professionals. The emphasis of teacher evaluation should be on their teaching and not individuals and take into account the involvement and responsiveness of people involved in the education process. The purpose of teacher evaluation is to safeguard and improve the quality of instruction received by students by fostering self-development.

Evaluation in higher education entails gathering evidence about the impact of teaching, topic and course design on students’ participation and achievement and the appropriateness of content and procedures. Effective evaluation of teaching is the basis of good educational practice. A good starting point is the Teacher’s Perspectives Inventory (TPI) [9]. It is a short questionnaire summarizing teachers’ views and perceptions about teaching. On the evaluation data a number of important decisions can be based, i.e. changes in course structure, in teaching processes, in course content, changes to assessment tasks, students’ workload, and staff development. Moreover, student ratings have the potential to contribute positively to improvement of teaching [10]. When teachers review their teaching in the light of the student feedback, it is important to reassure students by giving them feedback about their concerns, complaints or suggestions, so that learners know that changes would be made as a result.

In this paper, the data on learners’ self-assessment of learning various Language for Specific Purposes skills have been described. At the end of course students’ perceptions on success in learning and quality of teaching have also been surveyed. Implications of the research findings have been discussed.

**Research data and discussion**
The research on learner self-assessment in the LSP classes goes back to 2000. Each year there were groups of students who responded to questionnaires or were interviewed individually on various occasions. The total number of respondents exceeds 250.

It should be noted that annual findings differ within the error limits, therefore some generalizations on assessment data can be made.

Data on learners’ self-assessment of some language skills are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Self-assessment of some LSP skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the Table 1, reading skills are highly evaluated by students – 40% as very good and 48% as good. It should be noted that flaws in reading are easy to conceal, and in practice, testing of reading skills shows a worse performance than anticipated by students and is discussed in [11].

Assessment of writing skills is more realistic – 58% of students think their writing is either satisfactory or weak, and 42% - good or very good. Speaking skills seem to be assessed favorably – as many as 70% of students consider them good and very good, and only 30% - as satisfactory or weak. Surprisingly, distribution in vocabulary knowledge is 45% against 55% - good versus weak. It is well known that fluent speaking is interrelated with good knowledge of vocabulary. Consequently, there should be fewer fluent speakers than the Table 1 displays. This notion was confirmed by testing data in [12].
There was a new development highlighting the respondents’ ‘success experiences’. Success is bound to lead to the enhanced motivation and the confidence boost [13] and is vital in the process of language learning by fostering learners’ positive attitude.

Chart 1 displays the results on self-assessment of success experience. Surprisingly, 10% of respondents do not think they had any success in learning language. However 80% of learners are proud of their oral presentations, and 90% feel their performance in ESP vocabulary tests has been praiseworthy. As many as 85% are sure they are good at translating from L2 into L1.

Students’ evaluation of our teaching quality is presented in two consecutive charts – one for each of us. The findings are the result of administering the Course Experience Questionnaire at the end of the course. Here is our designed questionnaire:

1. Teaching was: a) excellent b) good c) satisfactory d) bad e) other
2. Goals of teaching were: a) clear b) vague c) other
3. Assessment was: a) appropriate b) inappropriate c) other
4. Workload was: a) appropriate b) too low c) too high d) other
5. Overall satisfaction with the course is: a) good b) bad c) other

Chart 2 shows evaluation of GK teaching quality, and Chart 3 - evaluation of LA teaching. The number of students who took part in each survey differs – there were 32 students in GK groups and 52 students in LA groups.

There are four groups of double columns and one group of triple columns in Chart 2. The first bars in each column display answers to each question as
follows: 1b) good, 2a) clear, 3a) appropriate, 4a) appropriate, and 5a) good. The number of students that were dissatisfied with some aspects of the LSP course was between 2 and 4, which makes 6% and 12%, respectively. The numbers of negative responses are shown by second bars in each group of columns as follows: 1c) satisfactory, 2b) vague, 3c) inappropriate, 4c) too high, 5b) bad.

Chart 2. Assessment of GK teaching quality

Chart 3. Assessment of LA teaching quality.
In Chart 3, there are similar assessment data for another teacher - LA. The essential difference is that 12 students found LA teaching excellent. The
percentage of unsatisfied students is within the same limits – between 6% and 12%, respectively. Otherwise, the interpretation of the first and second bars in column groups (2, 3, 4 and 5) is the same. Unfortunately, none of these students specified why they found assessment inappropriate or teaching unsatisfactory. Their comments might have been useful for improving quality of teaching in the future.

Conclusions and implications of research

The results obtained in this research demonstrate that data provide information for thought – to reflect on reasons why some learners have not experienced any success in learning.

A great majority of students – between 80% and 90% - believe their skills in presentations, mastering LSP vocabulary and translation are quite remarkable.

The technique of self-assessment plays important part in evaluating the effectiveness of individual learning and training learners for a life long learning.

Evaluation of teaching quality has shown that majority of learners found teaching good, goals – clear, assessment – appropriate, workload – normal, and all in all are satisfied with the course. Learner evaluation of teaching is a good tool to encourage teachers to think over their methods, techniques, materials and teaching styles.

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MOKYMO/SI KOKYBĖS VERTINIMAS KALBOS SPECIALIESIEMS TIKSLAMS TERPĖJE

Santrauka

Staipsnyje keliana mintis, jog mokymo kokybės vertinimas negali būti vienpusis ir vienareikšmis. Kalbos mokymo procese, ypač tuo atveju, kai jame dalyvauja suaugusiems studentai ar kursų dalyviai – pasiekimų vertinimo teisę ir kriterijus turi abit suinteresesios pusės – tiek dėstytojas, tiek studentai. Maža to, abit pusės turi save vertinimo skales, kurios tarsi duoda impulsą tolesniam mokymo/si tikslų formulavimui. Taigi, kurso pradžioje studentai griežtai ir savikritiškai vertina savo kalbėjimo, klausymo, rašymo ir suvokimo įgūdžius; dėstytojas, turėdamas objektyvius kriterijus aukščiau minėtiems įgūdžiams patikrinti, formuluojà kurso tikslus ir metodus tiems tikslams pasiekti. Kaip paaikėjà iš ilgmečio tyrimo apibendrinimo, mokymo proceso pabaigoje studentai geriausiai vertina savo pasiekimus kalbėjimo, klausymo, rašymo ir suvokimo įgūdžius, nors objektyvus vertinimas rodo kitą kitą; taip atsitinka tiek to, jog skaitymo spragos lengvai praslysta proakis ir nei skirtų vertintojas jų gali nepastebėti. Didžiulę pažangą įgūdžių srityje studentai palyginimas pradinio savęs vertinimo, kuriame didesnės studentų (54%) linkę ateitykštis sau kalbėjimo, tačiau baigtį kursų studentai sau vertina, tačiau savo gebėjimus kalbėti ir versti iš originalo kalbos į gimtą, tuo patvirtindami, kad žodynas jiems nebėra klūtis.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, jog esant normaliai mokymo proceso aplinkai, kai dėstymas vertinamas kaip geras, darbo tikslai – aiškūs, darbo krūvis – normalus, studentų save vertinimas būna netgi auksčesnis, nei dėstytojo. Tam įtakos turi gerai parinkti interaktyvus mokymo/si metodai, kurie įgalina studentų atskleisti savo stipripius puses kalbos specialiesiems tikslams terpeje ir susilaikti viešo savo bendraamžių įvertinimo.

Iš kitos pusės, kyla klausimas, kodėl 10% studentų galutiniame savęs vertinime teigia, jog jie nepadarė pažangos kalbos mokėjimui. Būtų tiesiogiai teigti, jog jų įvaizdavimas, ko bus išmokta, visiškai neatitiko turinio, nes kurso tikslai ir uždaviniai buvo suformuluoti dalyvaujant studentams ir pagal jų reikmes. Veikiau turėtume analizuoti studentų bendrasias nuostatas mokymosi proceso atžvilgiu bei jų pačių rolės tame procese suvokimą.