E-Teacher Professional Development Workshop
University of Maryland, Baltimore County and
University of Oregon, Summer 2012

To Fail or Not to Fail the Students?
The Importance of EFL Assessment in Higher Education in Azerbaijan
Ulker Ibrahimova, Azerbaijan

The four-week training workshop on the importance of EFL assessment in higher education of Azerbaijan will take place in November 2012 and will be followed by a four-week online forum. The participants will be 30 EFL teachers of various higher educational institutions, both novice and experienced, who are involved or have interest in testing and assessment at their workplace. The program will enhance participants’ understanding of the intricate relationship between EFL teaching and its assessment, and further introduce fundamental principles of assessment as well as its traditional and alternative types. It will also cover such crucial practical issues as the types of tests, and ways of developing valid assessment rubrics. By the end of the workshop, the participants will be able to differentiate between various types and methods of assessment as well as to develop assessment tools and criteria to be used in their respective institutions. The workshop will take place either in the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy where the instructor currently teaches or at the Azerbaijan English Teachers’ Association (AzETA) Head Office located in the Slavic University of Azerbaijan. The training workshop will mainly be based on the materials of the US Department of State, E-Teacher Scholarship Program online course at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (September 22 – December 14, 2011) as well as three-week UMBC E-teacher Professional Development Scholarship Program (July 21 – August 12, 2012).

Host: Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA) or the Azerbaijan English Teachers’ Association (AzETA)

Participants: 30 EFL pre- and in-service teachers of higher educational institutions

Program: 4-week training workshop on the importance of EFL assessment in higher education followed by a 4-week online forum

Schedule: Four consecutive Saturdays, November 2012 and online forum – December 2012

Goals: The training program will enhance participants’ understanding of the relationship between EFL teaching and its assessment: it will introduce fundamental principles of assessment as well as its traditional and alternative types. It will also cover such crucial practical issues as the types of tests and ways of developing valid assessment rubrics. By the end of the workshop, the participants will be able to differentiate between various types and methods of assessment as well as to develop assessment tools and criteria to be used in their respective institutions.
Problem Identification
In Azerbaijan, EFL teachers working in higher educational settings come across many problems when assessing students’ knowledge and interpreting the results. They use interactive methods of EFL instruction trying to implement modern teaching methodology such as skill/content/context-based instruction to build students’ language competence; however, when it comes to assessment, there is a lack of consistency between the tests administered and the approaches teachers actually use in the classroom. Moreover, most of the assessment is summative, norm-referenced and non-continuous. Unfortunately, teachers do not see assessment as an ongoing continuous process that should go hand in hand with EFL teaching itself and complement it, i.e., they do not perceive assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning. Besides, most tests greatly suffer from either construct irrelevance or construct underrepresentation, that is, as assessment tools, they very frequently do not serve the purposes they have been allegedly designed for or only serve to a limited extent. Although some teachers apply various principles of assessment to their test-designing process, it is predominantly accomplished intuitively, and consequently, inconsistently. What is more, assessment criteria/rubrics are often not clearly stated or communicated to students. All these problems should be regarded as very serious as they form the basis on which higher educational institution authorities make their judgments as to pass or fail students who scored below the benchmark.

So, the lack of a shared theoretical and practical knowledge of the fundamental principles of language testing undermines the whole working process and its outcomes, as well as students’ perception of the English language achievement tests administered at higher educational establishments. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that all teachers be aware of the types of tests, the essential principles and types of assessment, and the need to comply with all of them as much as possible in any teaching context.

Contextual Analysis
In Azerbaijan, EFL instruction is gaining more and more importance and weight in the higher educational setting. All the higher educational institutions devote an increasing number of hours to EFL learning. Normally, the EFL courses offered are listening and speaking, academic reading and writing, language use, and additionally, at some of them, English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Certain institutions even offer Content-Based Instruction in such areas as British/American Literature and Cultural Studies. Depending on the institution, assessment of the learnt material is performed from 2 up to 5 times per semester.

A possible site for the workshop could be either Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA), fully equipped with technology where the trainer actually teaches, or Azerbaijan English Teachers Association (AzETA) Head Office, which is situated in the Azerbaijan Slavic University, Baku. Upon completion of the workshop, the instructor and the AzETA trainees will conduct similar workshops for the EFL teachers of higher educational institutions located in other cities such as Gandja and Lenkoran as well as for teachers in the rural regions thus extending the project to the secondary school level. This workshop will enable the teachers to reflect on the role of assessment and turn it into an inseparable part of teaching.

Learner Analysis
The trainees for the regular three-month program are secondary school teachers from the region. Their own contact with English is limited; they rarely use English outside their teaching contexts. Most teachers are products of the state schools in which they teach. Not only do they have limited language resources but also utilize dated teaching methods. They typically prefer reading in their own languages rather than English since they cannot understand it very well. Though the teachers have a degree in education, their instructional strategies remain limited to what they have grown up with as learners, and the opportunities for professional growth through in-service programs are limited. The trainees range in age from 25 to 58. All the participants at the training programs express a strong desire to improve their own speaking skills more than anything else. Their computer skills are limited or non-existent, but they enjoy taking computer classes at the institute. Given this background of limited exposure, the teachers are hardly acquainted with the concept of critical thinking skills. They are conditioned to think and teach in set patterns.
The teachers’ current levels are revealed through diagnostic tests which are used to assess the language skills of the teachers in order to structure proficiency classes to suit their levels and needs. The tests consist of five sections, which include listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. In addition to this, informal interaction with participants and the personal experiences of trainers serve as valuable data in understanding the learners’ backgrounds and teaching contexts.

**Content Analysis**

The training series intend to lay the theoretical basis for the concept of assessment in EFL teaching starting from its role and place in teaching including both traditional and alternative types of assessment to its implementation. At the same time, it will provide plenty of opportunities to practice the concepts and methods learnt through collaborative learning by developing their own assessment materials and analyses of samples.

The training workshop will include the following topics:

**Training session 1:**
- The relationship between EFL teaching, learning, testing and assessment
- Fundamental principles of assessment

**Training session 2:**
Types of tests/the purposes they serve
- Sample assessment tools to analyze and elaborate on
- Hands-on practice - developing/improving their own assessment tools

**Training session 3:**
- Alternative assessment: pros and cons
- The place and role of alternative assessment in EFL teaching

**Training session 4:**
- Creating/developing assessment rubrics/scoring criteria
- Academic versus non-academic factors
- Focus on instructions and task types

The intent of these workshops is to function as a springboard for the participants to further disseminate the knowledge gained. The participants who are also members of AzETA will assist in organizing similar workshops for EFL teachers in both urban and rural regions, thus extending the project to secondary school level.

The materials to be used will include materials from the U.S. Department of State, E-Teacher Scholarship Program online course at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (September 22 – December 14, 2011). The instructor will use learner/content-centered and task-based approaches in training sessions.

The trainees need to possess basic computer skills such as Microsoft Windows programs as well as Internet Explorer; moreover, they should be able to use some of the elements of Web 2.0, such as Google Docs and forums. An introductory training of the computer skills required will be incorporated into the training program.

**Delivery Analysis**

For the workshop to be successful and purposeful, the instructor will develop the following materials:
- On-line survey to find out the learners’ profile
- Power point presentations to accompany each training session
- Sample assessment tools/sample assessment criteria
- Group/pair work activities
- Comprehension quiz at the end of each session
• Final feedback questionnaire

The instructor will also set up an online forum for the participants to be able to follow up and discuss one another’s assessment tools to be developed for the end-of-term tests due end of December, 2012.

**Project Plan**
The four-session workshop on EFL assessment will be held four consecutive Fridays in November 2012 followed by a 4-week forum for the participants to discuss and peer-review the assessment materials they will have developed for the end-of-term exams.

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<tr>
<th>TENTATIVE TIMETABLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 9, 2012</td>
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<td>November 23, 2012</td>
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<td>Is there Anything Better than Tests?</td>
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The dates may change depending on the availability of the participants of the training workshop.

**Design**
EFL Assessment is an important inseparable part of EFL teaching. So, the purpose of the workshop is to enhance EFL teachers’ understanding of the important role assessment plays in EFL teaching as well as to introduce the participants to the types of effective alternative assessment. In addition, the trainees will have ample opportunities to put the theory into practice through collaborative analyses and development of assessment materials. By the end of the workshop, participants will be equipped with theoretical basis of assessment as well as have practical assessment tools ready for administration in their respective EFL environment.
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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Learning/Training Activity</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. By the end of the first session, trainees should be able to identify the relationship between EFL teaching and assessment and define 5 fundamental principles of assessment.</td>
<td>UMBC ELC 689 E-Course (Fall, 2011): - Relationship/differences between testing and assessment - Essential assessment principles</td>
<td>Brainstorming on the concept of assessment - Introduction to the basic types of assessment (Power Point presentation) - Pair-followed by group discussion of the assessment types teachers use in classroom - Mind maps: Principles of assessment - Presenting assessment principles (power point presentation)</td>
<td>Participation in pair/group discussions - Comprehension quiz</td>
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<td>2. By the end of the second session, trainees should be able to differentiate 4 types of tests (placement/diagnostic/achievement/proficiency) and their purposes, analyze and identify problems in sample test items, and reflect on possible ways of improvement.</td>
<td>UMBC ELC 689 E-Course (Fall, 2011): - Types of tests/purposes they serve - Test samples (prepared by the instructor) - Common problems with test items (Power Point Presentation developed by the instructor J., Ch., Alderson, C., Clapham, D., Wall, Language Test Construction and Evaluation, 1995)</td>
<td>Group discussion of the tests administered at participants' institutions and their purposes - Pair work: analyzing 2 sample assessment sheets - Offer at least 1 way for possible improvement per item</td>
<td>Participation in group discussion - Identifying problems in sample items using the terms introduced at training session 1 - Constructive feedback on test item faults - Comprehension quiz</td>
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<td>3. By the end of the third session, trainees should be able to compare alternative assessment to traditional one; identify advantages/disadvantages of alternative assessment; discuss and explain which situation in their EFL environment it will suit best.</td>
<td>UMBC ELC 689 E-Course (Fall, 2011): • Video material “Shaping the Way We Teach” • Samples of individual/group project work (prepared by the instructor)</td>
<td>Experiential activities to demonstrate the use of: • projects • poster/body presentations</td>
<td>Group demonstrations of 1 poster presentation, and 1 body presentation Group discussion of alternative assessment tools and where they would fit in their individual EFL teaching</td>
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<td>4. By the end of the fourth session, trainees should be able to describe holistic vs. analytical approaches, define the concept of weighting, and specify the variables in creating assessment rubrics for particular situations.</td>
<td>UMBC ELC 689 E-Course (Fall, 2011): • Why do we need rubrics and how do we create them? • Samples of holistic/analytical assessment scales • 1 Checklist with assignments (developed by the instructor)</td>
<td>Brainstorming on the reasons and ways of creating rubrics Groupwork: identify assessment criteria for each of the five assignments (Checklist with different assignments)</td>
<td>Participation in group discussion In groups, identifying assessment criteria to fill in 1 check-list with 5 different assignments Comprehension quiz</td>
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**Rationale for Sequence**
The first training session will play an introductory role, starting with the relationship of EFL teaching and assessment and identifying the place of the latter in education as it is of utmost importance to recognize the inseparability of assessment from teaching and learning. It will also deal with fundamental principles of assessment that form the basis of any assessment process. In the second session, the focus will be primarily on types of tests and common faults of test designers. The test items analysis will be facilitated by the knowledge the participants will have gained on fundamental principles of assessment from the first session.

Assessment rubrics will be taught after the Alternative Assessment session so that the trainees have the opportunity to analyze and identify certain criteria that will fit different assignments applied in the EFL environment. It will also wrap up the course by restating the important role of assessment in teaching.

**Development**
Training session 2 will be chosen as an example of the four-session EFL assessment workshop to be held in November, 2012. It will focus on types of tests, their purposes, common problems with tests and ways of improving test items. The two-hour training session will include groupwork, Power-Point presentation, discussions, a matching exercise, and critical thinking skills. In addition, it will enable the
participants to consolidate and apply the knowledge of the first session (role and interrelationship between EFL teaching and assessment and fundamental principles of assessment) to the problem-solving situations at this training.

1. Gain attention
   A cartoon (App.1) on the theme of testing will be shown to the participants. There will be an open-class discussion of the idea behind and the underlying problem. The instructor anticipates that one of the answers will be: “Tests do not serve their purpose, they just train students for different task types”. Then, the trainees will be asked to reflect/brainstorm in groups of three on the possible purposes of tests (mind maps). The instructor will elicit and put the answers together on the whiteboard.

2. Inform learners of objectives
   After the brainstorming activity, the trainees will be explicitly informed of the objectives. By the end of the training session, the teachers will be able to:
   - Differentiate various kinds of language tests, and the purposes they serve
   - Analyze problems in sample assessment tools
   - Reflect on the ways to improve existing tests

3. Stimulate recall of prior learning
   Comprehension quiz on the fundamental principles of assessment

4. Present the content
   Power-point presentation of the main concepts and distinctions in testing
   Test samples
   Handouts with the summary of the theoretical concepts covered

5. Guide learning
   Comprehension quiz to restore the prior material learnt and build connection to the new material
   Instructor is a facilitator of group discussions and of think-pair-share activities at the training session

6. Elicit performance (practice)
   Pair work: Matching exercise - match the categories of tests to their definitions - open-classroom check
   Discussion on which types of tests are in use in their EFL environment
   Group discussion: identifying and analyzing the problems in sample tests in terms of the 5 fundamental principles of assessment
   Think-pair-share: ways of improving the sample tests (each group presents on flip-chart posters)
   - Problem identified in the test samples
   - How the groups would improve them
   Instructor encourages groups’ asking questions

7. Provide feedback
   Instructor comments on participants’ answers, group work, and group presentations

8. Assess performance
   Comprehension quiz answers
   Participation in group discussions and performance
Trainees are set a homework assignment to reflect upon ways of improving tests designed by themselves or administered at their institution, in compliance with the basic principles of assessment and the purpose of the test, to present at the next testing workshop.

**Implementation Checklist**

**Items**
- Flip-charts
- Markers
- Paper
- Stationery (Staples, stickers, paper clips, tape, etc.)
- Folders
- Pens
- Projects for power-point presentation

**Tasks**
- Setting the program schedule and e-mailing to the participants
- Copying handouts
- Meeting participants
- Arranging the room
- Arranging the tables to facilitate group work

**Evaluation**

Evaluation of the workshop will be both formative and summative. This will be conducted through the final post-workshop feedback questionnaire and followed up through a four-week online forum set for the participants by the instructor. Participants will be set clear directions on providing data not only of their performance in assessment such as challenges encountered and ways they used to resolve them, but also of students’ perception of the changes in the assessment character and procedures. They will be asked to conduct informal interviews and formal feedback questionnaires for their students on alternative assessment assignments, rubrics, and test administration in general.

So, evaluation will include the following components:
- Weekly Informal interviews of the participants’ views
- Final feedback questionnaire evaluating the instructor, material covered, and method of delivery
- Students’ end-of-semester feedback questionnaires
- Assessment of students’ project/presentation/portfolio assignments
- Post-forum feedback questionnaire on the effectiveness of online discussions and idea exchange

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<tr>
<th>Expected Outcomes</th>
<th>“The Importance of EFL assessment in Higher Education in Azerbaijan” four-week training workshop</th>
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<tr>
<td>Learning through the workshop</td>
<td>Course assignments Participation in open-classroom and group discussions Comprehension quizzes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with the workshop</td>
<td>Weekly Informal interviews of the participants’ views Final feedback questionnaire Post-forum feedback questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changes in students’ perception of EFL assessment</td>
<td>Weekly online forum discussions Students’ end-of-semester feedback questionnaires</td>
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Appendix 1

Quiz

Dear teachers, to check your understanding of the testing terms presented at previous training session, please take the following quiz:

1. If a test requires too much time to create and administer it, it lacks ___________________.

2. If the test items are deprived of context and are isolated, if the texts do not relate to the field of interest of the test-takers, the assessment tool is not ___________________.

3. If a test is designed to punish or fail the students, if the students would like to see and discuss the test results and are not allowed to, there is no ___________________.

4. The test on reading comprehension has a lot of vocabulary items that can easily be fulfilled without reading the text. This test has problems in ___________________.

5. If two or more similar groups of test-takers take the same test and exhibit completely different results, the test is ___________________.

6. If in a writing test the students are required to read long rubrics, or in a reading test - to write extensively, the test lacks ___________________.