

## ***Objective and Subjective Testing***

It worth mentioning that apart from scoring and testing the learners' abilities another essential role could be devoted to indirect factors that influence evaluating. These are objective and subjective issues in testing. According to Hughes (1989:19), the difference between these two types is the way of scoring and presence or absence of the examiner's judgement. If there is not any judgement, the test is objective. On the contrary, the subjective test involves personal judgement of the examiner. The author of the paper sees it as when testing the students objectively, the teacher usually checks just the knowledge of the topic. Whereas, testing subjectively could imply the teacher's ideas and judgements. This could be encountered during speaking test where the student can produce either positive or negative impression on the teacher. Moreover, the teacher's impression and his/her knowledge of the students' true abilities can seriously influence assessing process. For example, the student has failed the test; however, the teacher knows the true abilities of the student and, therefore, s/he will assess the work of that student differently taking all the factors into **account**.

Now that we have studied general test writing strategies, ideas, and tips, it is time to pull our focus inward to the details of the questions themselves.

In general, question types fall into two categories:

1. Objective
2. Subjective

I needed specific definitions for these, which I found here.

1. Objective, which require students to select the correct response from several alternatives or to supply a word or short phrase to answer a question or complete a statement.

Examples: multiple choice, true-false, matching, completion

2. Subjective or essay, which permit the student to organize and present an original answer

Examples: short-answer essay, extended-response essay, problem solving, performance test items

This source also suggests guidelines for choosing between them:

Essay tests are appropriate when:

- The group to be tested is small and the test is not to be reused
- You wish to encourage and reward the development of student skill in writing
- You are more interested in exploring student attitudes than in measuring his/her achievement

Objective tests are appropriate when:

- The group to be tested is large and the test may be reused.
- Highly reliable scores must be obtained as efficiently as possible.
- Impartiality of evaluation, fairness, and free from possible test scoring influences are essential.

Either essay or objective tests can be used to:

- Measure almost any important educational achievement a written test can measure
- Test understanding and ability to apply principles.
- Test ability to think critically.
- Test ability to solve problems.

And it continues with this bit of advice:

The matching of learning objective expectations with certain item types provides a high degree of test validity: testing what is supposed to be tested.

- Demonstrate or show: performance test items
- Explain or describe: essay test items

I wanted to see what different sources would say, so I also found this one.

If you want the student to compare and contrast an issue taught during a history lesson, open ended questions may be the best option to evaluate the student's understanding of the subject matter.

If you are seeking to measure the student's reasoning skills, analysis skills, or general comprehension of a subject matter, consider selecting primarily multiple choice questions.

Or, for a varied approach, utilize a combination of all available test question types so that you can appeal to the learning strengths of any student on the exam.

Take into consideration both the objectives of the test and the overall time available for taking and scoring your tests when selecting the best format.

I am not sure that "multiple choice" should be the primary choice but I understand they are suggesting to avoid open-ended questions if you want to measure reasoning or analytic skills or general comprehension.

This bothers me a little. It seems to me, from reviewing the previous posts in this blog, that an open-ended question could measure those skills. The example that comes to mind is the question I had in botany about describing the cell types a pin might encounter when passing through a plant stem. That was an essay question measuring general comprehension of plant tissues.

The following source brings up good points about analyzing the results. It also notes that objective tests, when "constructed imaginatively," can test at higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Objective tests are especially well suited to certain types of tasks. Because questions can be designed to be answered quickly, they allow lecturers to test students on a wide range of material. ... Additionally, statistical analysis on the performance of individual students, cohorts and questions is possible.

The capacity of objective tests to assess a wide range of learning is often underestimated. Objective tests are very good at examining recall of facts,

knowledge and application of terms, and questions that require short text or numerical responses. But a common worry is that objective tests cannot assess learning beyond basic comprehension.

However, questions that are constructed imaginatively can challenge students and test higher learning levels. For example, students can be presented with case studies or a collection of data (such as a set of medical symptoms) and be asked to provide an analysis by answering a series of questions...

Problem solving can also be assessed with the right type of questions. ...

A further worry is that objective tests result in inflated scores due to guessing. However, the effects of guessing can be eliminated through a combination of question design and scoring techniques. With the right number of questions and distracters, distortion through guessing becomes largely irrelevant. Alternatively, guessing can be encouraged and measured if this is thought to be a desirable skill.

There are, however, limits to what objective tests can assess. They cannot, for example, test the competence to communicate, the skill of constructing arguments or the ability to offer original responses. Tests must be carefully constructed in order to avoid the decontextualisation of knowledge (Paxton 1998) and it is wise to use objective testing as only one of a variety of assessment methods within a module. However, in times of growing student numbers and decreasing resources, objective testing can offer a viable addition to the range of assessment types available to a teacher or lecturer.

I like their point about how objective tests cannot test competence to communicate, construct arguments, or offer original answers. Training our students to take only multiple choice tests (or simply answer “true” or “false”) does not help them to learn how to explain their thoughts or even ensure that they can write coherent sentences.

This is addressed by the second source and in previous posts. The suggestion is to use a variety of test item types. This can give you a better picture of what your students know, whereas using one single type

can be biased against students who are not strong respondents to that type.

Subjective and objective are terms used to refer to the scoring tests. All test items, no matter how they are devised, require candidates to exercise a subjective judgment. In an essay test, for example, candidates must think of what to say and then express their ideas as well as possible; in a multiple choice test they have to weigh up carefully all the alternatives and select the best one. Furthermore, all tests are constructed subjectively by the tester, who decides which areas of language to test, how to test those particular areas, and what kind of items to use for this purpose. Thus, it is only the scoring of a test that can be described as objective. This means that a testee will score the same mark no matter which examiner marks the test.

Since objective tests usually have only one correct answer (or, at least, a limited number of correct answers), they can be scored mechanically. The fact that objective tests can be marked by computer is one important reason for their evident popularity among examining bodies responsible for testing large numbers of candidates.

Clearly, the ability to write can only be satisfactorily tested by a subjective examination requiring the students to perform a writing task similar to that required in real life. On the other hand, reliability will not be difficult to achieve in the marking of the following objective item. The question of how valid such an item is, however, may now be of considerable concern. How far do items like this reflect the real use of language in everyday life?

Complete the sentences by putting the best word in each blank.

‘Is your home still in Cairo?’

‘Yes, I’ve been living here ..... 1986.’

A. for      B. on      C. in      D. at      E. since

On the whole objective tests require far more careful preparation than subject tests. Examiners tend to spend a relatively short time on setting the questions but considerable time on marking. In objective test the tester spends a great deal of time constructing each test item as carefully as possible, attempting to anticipate the various reactions of the testees at each stage. The effort is rewarded, however, in the case of the marking.

## 2.1 OBJECTIVE TESTS

Objective tests are frequently criticized on the grounds that they are simpler to answer than subjective tests. Items in an objective test, however, can be made just as easy or as difficult as the test constructor wishes. The fact that objective tests may generally look easier is no indication at all that they are easier. Another criticism is that objective tests of the multiple-choice type encourage guessing. However, four or five alternatives for each item are sufficient to reduce the possibility of guessing. Furthermore, experience shows that candidates rarely make wild guesses on partial knowledge.

An objective test will be a very poor test if:

- the test items are very poorly written;
- irrelevant areas and skills are emphasized in the test simply because they are 'testable'; and
- it is confined to language-based usage and neglects the communicative skills involved

It should never be claimed that objective tests can do those tasks which they are not intended to do. As already indicated, they can never test the ability to communicate in the target language, nor can they evaluate actual performance. A good classroom test will usually contain both subjective and objective test items.

## 2.2 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN OBJECTIVE TESTING VERSUS SUBJECTIVE TESTING

The distinction here is between methods of scoring, and nothing else. If no judgment is required on the part of the scorer, then the scoring is objective. A multiple-choice test, with the correct responses unambiguously identified, would be a case in point. If judgment is called for, the scoring is said to be subjective. There are different degrees of subjectivity in testing. The impressionistic scoring of composition may be considered more subjective than the scoring of short answers in response to questions on a reading passage.

Objectivity in scoring is sought after by many testers, not for itself, but for the greater reliability it brings. In general, the less subjective the scoring, the greater agreement there will be between two different scorers (and between the scores of one person scoring the same test paper

on different occasion). However, these are ways of obtaining reliable subjective scoring, even of compositions.

