**DESIGNING A CLASSROOM LANGUAGE TEST**

**FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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Abstract

 *This paper attempts to give a scratch of classroom language test design which might be of a great necessity for teachers who want to evaluate their students’ attainment of their language program. Several important points should be taken into consideration to meet the quality of a language classroom test, among others are the stated objectives in the curriculum, the purpose of the test, the test items used, the test specifications that will reflect both the purpose and the objectives, the kind of scoring, grading, and/or feedback expected. This test design is also done under the basis of School Based Curriculum (KTSP) where discourse competence is of primary objective to be achieved. The competence concerns with the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, sentences, and utterances to achieve a unified spoken or written text.*

*Key words: discourse, competence, KTSP, objectives*

**INTRODUCTION**

 It is admitted by most English teachers that creating a test is not as easy as one thinks for it involves so many things to be taken into consideration. The fact that a test plays an important role in an educational program is unarguable because it can be used not only to evaluate the classroom achievement but also for other purposes such as for selection decisions, placement decisions, classification decisions, program improvement and evaluation decisions etc. Whether or not students are able to meet the objective of the teaching program can be seen from the result of the test. If the result is satisfactory, the teacher may continue to the next program with another objective. On the contrary, if it is unsatisfactory, he/she must reevaluate what’s wrong with the test. Is it because of the test itself which is inappropriate or because of the program which is difficult to be followed. In this case the teacher has to analyze what aspects of the program are difficult for individual students and for the class as a whole. By analyzing the mistakes made on a given test, or on given items of that test, the teacher can determine where to concentrate extra class drill and how best to assist each student. Besides, a test may also function as a stimulator. It means that it provides a rewarding experience. When the students perform well in the test of the target language, they will feel confident and feel challenge to know more and more.

 A test will also arise a bad impact or discourage the students when it is not constructed well or it might not be appropriate for measuring students’ competence. The inappropriateness of the test can be due to the teacher’s ignorance in relating the test to the curriculum, syllabus, teaching material. Those three components are intertwined that can not be separated one to the other. The failure of the students in the test can also be because of such an ignorance that it makes them unable to do the tests for what has been studied is not there in the test.

 This paper is, therefore, trying to show how to design a teacher made test for the Junior High School students. The test will show its relation to the curriculum, syllabus and material being taught.

**CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS**

 In North America, curriculum and syllabus are often used interchangeably though the fact that they are different. Curriculum, according to Shaw (1977) and Robertson (1971) quoted by Yalden (1983: 18-19) includes the goals, objectives, content, processes, resources, and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and out of the school and community through classroom instruction and related programs, while Syllabus is a statement of the plan for any part of the curriculum, excluding the element of curriculum evaluation itself. It is a plan which the teacher converts into a reality of classroom interaction. Some educationists may say that the meaning of curriculum in this case is old fashioned or traditional for its focus is in the process. However, this definition is still relevant to some extent to the educational program for many recent educators also define curriculum and syllabus in the same content. Richards (2001: 1-3), for example, is in line with the definition as stated by Yalden above who states that language curriculum is an aspect of a broader field of educational activity known as curriculum development or curriculum studies. However, its focuses are on determining what knowledge, skills, and values students learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring about intended learning outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools or educational systems can be planned, measured, and evaluated. While syllabus is one aspect of curriculum development but it is not identical with it. A syllabus is a specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested. Thus, the syllabus for a speaking course might specify the kinds of oral skills that will be taught and practiced during the course, the functions, topics, or other aspects of conversation that will be taught, and the order in which they will appear in the course. Feez and Joyce (2002: 2) also support the definition of syllabus as an explicit and coherent plan for a course of study. A syllabus is constructed by selecting and sequencing content, based on explicit objectives. It is a public document usually prepared by teachers and negotiated with learners. In short, curriculum is a broad plan for educational program which is brought into reality in syllabus, and based on the syllabus, the teacher will further develop it into course planning or lesson plan. This course planning tries to seek the answer of the following questions: (1) who is this course for? (2) What is the course about? and (3) What kind of teaching and learning will take place in the course.

 So, the difference between the traditional curriculum and modern one lies on their focuses. This is actually taken as a basis for creating School Based Curriculum (KTSP) as a response to the recent shift of English Language Teaching (ELT) to a more concern with developing discourse skills. The aim of ELT is now seen as enabling learners to develop the knowledge and skills which will allow them to engage with whole text appropriate to social contexts.

**SCHOOL BASED CURRICULUM (KTSP)**

School Based Curriculum (KTSP) which is rooted from the 2004 English curriculum is designed according to the government regulation in the sense that the curriculum has to be competence-based and that at the end of the day learners are expected to be able to communicate in English as one of their life skills and that they are expected to be able to handle written texts not only for pursuing further studies, but also for learning independently in order to be independent members of community. Besides, by creating school based curriculum is intended to give the opportunity to the schools, especially the teachers, school committee, counselor, head master and supervised by the Province/ Regency/City Education Department to be more creative in developing their own curriculum. It is not completely set up by the central government but as an operational curriculum, the schools manage in creating their own curriculum. This curriculum consists of vision, mission, the goals of the schools, curriculum structure, school calendar and attachment consisting of a) annual program, b) semester program, c) syllabus of all subjects, d) lesson plan of all subjects, e) competence standard and basic competence of local content, f) self-development program, g) basic competence or indicator mapping. This curriculum is different from the traditional one. Traditional curriculum which consists of goals, objectives, content, process, resources, means of evaluation its focus is in content/process, while School Based Curriculum which consists of goals, outcomes, learning arrangements, evaluation and documentation, its focus is on the outcomes and competences. The competences meant here are the discourse competences which concern with the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, sentences and utterances to achieve a unified spoken or written text. Competence may also mean the ability to understand and to express all kinds of meaning containing in the communication or text including attitude, interpersonal meaning, news, cohesion and coherence. Thus, the competence here is taken as the main goal of educational program. Competence is observable behaviors that are necessary for the successful completion of real world activities. For example, an English subject requires competencies to be able to invite someone, to get information, to greet someone, to ask service etc. It is therefore, the evaluation to see whether or not the objectives of the educational program, especially the competences are achieved, a test constructed should reflect the achievement of the competencies stated in the curriculum.

 This curriculum was set up under the basis of Law No. 20, 2003, concerning the National Educational System, the Decree No 19, 2005 concerning the educational national standard, the Decree No. 22, 2006 concerning the content standard, the Decree No. 23, 2006 concerning the Graduate Competence Standard, and the Decree No. 24, 2006 concerning the implementation of Content and Graduate Competence Standard

**WHAT IS A TEST**?

 Brown (2004:3), states that a test in simple terms, is a method of measuring a person’s ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. This definition implies that a test is a method and a measurement. A method because it is a set of techniques, procedures, or items that requires performance on the part of the test taker and it a measurement because it measures the general ability or specific competences or objectives. Nitko (1983: 5) distinguishes the definition of measurement, tests, and evaluation. Measurement is a procedure for assigning numbers (usually called scores) to a specified attribute or characteristic of a person in such a manner as to maintain the real world relationships among the persons with regard to the attribute being measured. For example, a spelling test designed to measure the spelling ability should result in the score.

 Meanwhile, a test is defined as a systematic procedure for observing and describing one or more characteristics of a person with the aid of either a numerical scale or a category system. Certain tests may also yield measurements. Tests are designed not only for providing information about an individual but also for determining whether the school systems have attained certain sets of goals. Evaluation is defined as the notion that the value or worth of someone or something is to be judged. Evaluation, then, involves judgment. The terms of formative and summative evaluation have been used to distinguished the roles of evaluation. Formative evaluation is concern with judgment made during the design and/or development of a program which are directed toward modifying , “forming” or otherwise improving the program before it is completed. While summative evaluation describes judgment about the merits of an already completed program, procedure, or product. Thus, it is clear that tests, assessments and evaluations are different from one to the other. Tests are prepared administrative procedure that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum learners muster all their faculties to offer peak performance, knowing that their response are being measured and evaluated. Assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. Tests are not the only form of assessment that a teacher can make but they are one among the others. They are useful devises for assessing student’s performances in language learning.

 Brown further states that assessments are commonly distinguished into two kinds, namely formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is evaluating students in the process of “forming” their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth processor. While summative assessment is aiming at measuring, or summarizing, what a student has grasped, and typically occurs at the end of a course or unit of instruction. This paper, however, will discuss the design of a test functions as a summative assessment which focuses on whether or not students have achieved the objectives, competences, stated in the curriculum. The competences to be tested are therefore, the spoken language competence covering short functional text, monolog and dialogue and written language competence covering short functional text and essays.

 **DESIGNING AN ENGLISH TEST FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

 A test, as has been mentioned before is a tool for evaluating whether or not the class has met the objective of the program. Through the tests the teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of a new teaching method, of a different approach patterns, or of new materials (Vallete 1977: 5). Besides, tests are also used to evaluate each student’s progress: his or her attainment of course objectives and his or her performance in relation of the rest of the class. Richards (2001: 292) suggests that a test, especially functions as a summative evaluation is concerned with determining the effectiveness of a program, its efficacy, and to some extent with its acceptability. It takes place after a program has been implemented and seeks to answer questions such as these: how effective was the course? Did it achieve its aim? What did the students learn? Did the materials work well? Was the amount of time spent on each unit sufficient? How appropriate were the teaching methods? What problems were encountered etc. Brown (2004: 42-45) is more or less of the same opinion that in designing a classroom language test, some critical questions must be put forward, namely what is the purpose of the test? What are the objectives of the test? How will the test specifications reflect both the purpose and the objectives? How will the test tasks be selected and separate items arranged? What kind of scoring, grading, and/or feedback is expected? Thus, a test designed should cover all of the objectives stated and the materials taught to achieve the objectives. The main objectives stated in the curriculum for Junior High School students is the ability to communicate orally or in written form in the interactional or monolog discourse especially dealing with *narrative, report, news item, analytical/ hortatory exposition, explanation, discussion, and review with the stress on* the interpersonal meaning. The following is a diagram that shows the activities involve in the classroom test design.

The purpose of testing

Performances to be tested

Types of test items

The goals of the curriculum

Develop the initial draft of the test

Edit the test items

Do items match the stated performances to be assessed?

Use the test for decision making

This diagram provides information of the steps taken for planning a particular test as follows: Step 1 the goals stated in the curriculum become the main parts of the pupil evaluation. The items on the test become the operational definition of the educational goals and pupil outcomes which you value. Step 2 the form and the content of tests are adjusted to the purposes of the assessment. In this case the information of the students’ attainment of the instructional goals is needed. Step 3 the determination of the performances to be tested whether spoken or written, whether reading or grammar etc. Step 4 when the expected performances have been determined then find the suitable type of test items whether multiple choice test, essay, or cloze test etc. Step 5 next, develop the initial draft of the test. This test may not be perfect yet, so it needs some revision. Step 6 edit the test items. This means that the draft of the test which is not yet proper needs to be edited. Step 7 check whether the test items have matched to the performances to be assessed. Step 8 when everything is in accordance with the plan, the test can be used for making decision.

 Since the goals stated in the curriculum of Junior High School are spoken and written language competences, then the test also cover the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The following is an example of the English test for Junior High School students designed and processed as state above.

**LISTENING**:

**A. Transactional**

Recorded:

A: Reynor, what did you buy?

B: I bought ice cream.

A: Did you also buy some bread?

B: No, I did not.

A: Ok. I’ll buy bread then.

Question:

What did Reynor buy?

A. Picture of milk C. Picture of an orange

B. Picture of ice cream D. Picture of bread

**B. Interpersonal**

Recorded:

A: Hi. How are you, Dea?

B: Fine, thanks, and you, Dara?

A: Not bad, thanks. Good weather, isn’t it?

B: Yes, better than yesterday.

A: I know. That was really terrible. I had never seen such a heavy rain.

B: Indeed. Neither had I, branches of trees fell on my neighbor’s car. It was totally

 damaged.

A: That’s too bad.

Question:

This conversation is between:

A. Two close friends C. Teacher and student

B. Two strangers D. Sales girl and a customer

The Purpose of this conversation is

A. to tell something about neighbor’s car C. to tell what happened last week

B. to forecast the weather D. to discuss bad weather

**SPEAKING**

**A. Answering factual questions**:

What’s your name?

Where do you live?

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

What is your hobby? Etc.

**B: Two students are required to build a dialogue.**

Instruction: Please build a dialogue concerning your plan on next weekend.

**C. Interpersonal**

Two students are given an opportunity to talk involving the feeling of like and dislike, happy and unhappy etc.

Dea, now you meet Dara at the café and talk about the Drama you watched last night. What would you say to each other?

**D. Monolog (3 minutes)**

Each student is given a different picture or photograph to be described to another student. The student tells the genre of the texts based on the picture.

The language components to be scored: Grammar and Vocabulary

The evaluator in this case will pay attention to the use of vocabulary and grammar whether they are properly used.

**E. Discourse Management**

The evaluator will pay attention to the student’s response whether or not it is relevant to the question. It is expected that the student can apply the conjunctions and other features of language in the dialogue correctly.

**READING**

To understand the nuances of meaning

An example of explanation text

*How are sedimentary rocks formed?*

*Sedimentary rock is formed by the compassion of layers of particles into a solid form. Sediments such as sand and mud settle onto the floors of oceans and lakes. Over a long period of time, several layers of sediments collect on the floor. These layers are pressed together for many thousands of years, fusing the small solid particles of mud and sand to form solid rock. This type of rock is called sedimentary rock.*

Besides, transactional texts such as announcement or notices are also used.

Example:

*Never leave luggage unattended.*

*Throw away any remaining medicine within one month of opening this bottle.*

*Did I leave a book in your house? The problem is it’s not mine.*

**Questions:**

a. The questions are generally concerning the content of the passage.

b. The questions are also directed to the understanding of the structure and vocabulary used in the

 texts.

c. Besides, the questions can also concern the types of text genres:

1. *Description*
2. *Explanation*
3. *Report*
4. *Exposition*

*The first sentence functions as:*

1. *description*
2. *phenomenon*
3. *orientation*
4. *setting the scenes*

#### WRITING

The exercises on writing can be in the form of transactional texts just things like Giving direction to the stranger in the student’s city. They can also be directed to the students’ ability in writing a certain type of text genre such as recount or description text.

*An example of writing exercise:*

*Directions:*

*Write what happened last night at home when it was raining heavily.*

**SCORING SYSTEM**

**SPEAKING**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Aspects to be scored | Score |
| 1 | Grammar and Vocabulary (Lexicogrammar)* + Use of right grammar and vocabulary
	+ Sometimes uses inappropriate grammar and vocabulary that obscures meaning
	+ Makes frequent errors of grammar and vocabulary that obscures meaning
	+ Misuse of grammar and vocabulary that makes comprehension quite difficult
	+ Vocabulary and grammar limitations so extreme as to make conversation virtually impossible
 | 43210 |
| 2 | Discourse Management* + Appears to understand and to response spoken discourse without difficulty
	+ Understands nearly everything at normal speed, although occasional misunderstanding happens.
	+ Misunderstands very often in responding conversation.
	+ Unable to understand and to respond a simple conversation.
	+ Produces non-contextual words.
 | 43210 |
| 3 | Pronunciation and Intonation* + Pronunciation and intonation are quite clear, closely approximating that of a native speaker.
	+ Pronunciation and intonation are clear though one is conscious of a definite accent.
	+ Pronunciation and intonation are not so clear as to make the meaning obscures.
	+ Pronunciation and intonation so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.
	+ Unable to pronuonce words to express meaning
 | 43210 |

**SCORING WRITING**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Aspects to be scored | Score |
| 1 | Grammar and Vocabulary (Lexicogrammar)* + Use of right grammar and vocabulary
	+ Sometimes uses inappropriate grammar and vocabulary that obscures meaning
	+ Makes frequent errors of grammar and vocabulary but does not obscure meaning
	+ Misuse of grammar and vocabulary that obscures meaning
	+ Vocabulary and grammar limitations so extreme as to make writing unable to be understood.
	+ Writing does not develop.
 | 43210 |
| 2 | Discourse Management: short functional text* + Realizing the proper rhetoric steps in written language genre so as to meet the objective of communication (For example: announcement, invitation)
	+ Realizing the rhetoric steps in clear objective of communication though sometimes errors are made.
	+ Writing words with no clear objective of communication and difficult to understand
	+ Writing words but the communication objective is not achieved.
	+ Only producing words that can not form a text.
 | 43210 |

**CONCLUSIONS**

 For most of the language teachers may assume that a language test is a device that tries to assess how much has been learned in a foreign language course, or some part of the course. With respect to such assumption it might be reasonable to ask whether the tests made by most teachers are appropriate and would reflect students’ achievement of the learning objective at the end of the course. The appropriateness of the test can be seen from its relation to its content to the stated objective in the curriculum and the materials used to achieve the objective. Based on the School Based Curriculum of Junior High School, the discourse competence of spoken or written has become the central point for the test design. To arrive at that objective, a test consisting of four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing must be constructed.

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