

WCES 2014

Accommodating Teachers Attitudes Towards New Educational Testing Paradigms Through The OPENPAU Project

Jesús García Laborda^{a*}, José González Such^b, Alfredo Álvarez Álvarez^a

*a*Universidad de Alcala, c/ Trinidad, 3, 28801 Alcalá Henraes-Madrid, Spain

b Grupo MIDE-Universidad de Valencia, Avenida Blasco Ibañez 30, Valencia 46010, Spain

Abstract

Testing is an issue of increasing importance. While for many teachers language learning should be communicative; in fact, they expect their students to provide evidence of their knowledge. Thus, there is a clear mismatch on the approach to language teaching and language testing. As a consequence, there is an evident need change the testing paradigms. Purpose of the paper: This paper suggests guidelines that are currently researched in the OPENPAU project to change the teachers' perspective towards oral testing. Sources of Evidence: Evidence was obtained through the interaction of four expert teachers with experience in oral testing. Analysis and results: The study indicates that teachers' should have positive interventions in tests rather than just trying to simply obtain data.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of WCES 2014

Keywords: Testing; speaking; Teacher training; test moderation.

1. Introduction

Testing is currently a developing area in education, linguistics and language learning. There are important reasons why testing has acquired its own personality being accountability the most important probably. Since there is a need to place students for language courses, observe their progress through the year or getting access to higher levels of education sometimes even on a competitive basis (i.e. access to higher education). The implications of testing,

* Jesús García Laborda. Tel.: +34 91 885 5041; fax: +34 91 885 4441.

E-mail address: jesus.garcialaborda@uah.es

however, go far beyond the different types of validity. The current perspective in linguistics has been mostly influenced by the different testing institutions especially the Educational Testing System (TOEFL) in the United States or the Cambridge Board of Examinations (First/Advanced/Proficiency diplomas). Although the TOEFL exam has been reluctant to suggest their own model of language testing and they focus on validation especially external validation based on the possible inferences that can be obtained from the test, it is evident that they follow a cognitive approach to language testing which clashes with the objectives of the test which are mainly two: showing capacity to pursue studies in higher education and being communicative enough to have a regular university life. On the other hand, the Cambridge Board of Examination focuses on diagnosing the actual candidate's candidate. Thus, while ETS focuses on consequential validity, the Cambridge Board looks at internal validity.

On the other hand, the current situation in Spain is rather different. According to García Laborda (2010), the University Entrance Examination lacks clear objectives. He believes that the test should serve to be a combination of the British and American institutions by measuring the candidate's competence and foresee its possibilities to study in an English oriented setting or, at least, to use English produced materials to support the student's learning. However, the current test does not do any discrimination. And most students pass the B1-level PAU test although they hardly ever achieve such competence level. Figure 1 presents the results obtained in the Basque Country as a just an example of the results obtained in an average-size region of Spain.

Figure1. Results of the English section of the University Entrance Examination in the Basque Country in 2012 (source: University of the Basque Country at http://www.sarrera.ehu.es/p259-content/es/contenidos/informacion/estadisticas_pau/es_pau/adjuntos/Informe_PAU_2012.pdf).

Pass=>=5					
	Test takers	Absent	Pass	%	Average
By Province					
Araba/Alava	1.144	4	934	81,93	6,80
Bizkaia	4.073	22	3.059	75,51	6,23
Gipuzkoa	3.096	15	2.550	82,77	6,69
Desconocido	2		1	50,00	3,63
Type of school					
Centros públicos	3.830	34	2.920	76,92	6,37
Otros centros	4.483	7	3.623	80,94	6,58
Desconocido	2		1	50,00	3,63
Sex					
Hombres	3.768	17	3.017	80,43	6,55
Mujeres	4.547	24	3.527	77,98	6,42
First Language					
Euskera	5.185	22	4.181	80,98	6,59
Castellano	3.130	19	2.363	75,96	6,30
Total Basque Country	8.315	41	6.544	79,09	6,48

Another study done in 2012 as well revealed that about 45% of the students in grade 12th (last year in high school) did not achieve a B1 speaking competence after 12 years of foreign language learning. Table 2 reproduces the average grade of those 55% of the students who passed. Since B1 is not a competence level that permits studying in a foreign language, it is easy to understand that according to this report most Spanish students would not be able to study in English and the results from European Survey of Language Competence also proves that they cannot read, write or understand spoken language and thus neither have a university life in English nor using English as a learning tool.

Figure 2. Results of the pilot study on the speaking competence of 12th graders N=1194 students (source: Instituto Nacional Evaluación Educativa at <http://www.meecd.gob.es/dctm/inee/documentos-de-trabajo/informe-pau-ingles.pdf?documentId=0901e72b8170cdc9>)

		Criterio					Total
		Alcance	Corrección Gramatical	Fluidez	Interacción	Coherencia	
1ª Parte	Media	5.78	5.56	5.86	6.04	6.04	5.86
	E.T.	0.0634	.06392	0.0676	0.0666	0.0658	0.0648
	D.T.	2.192	2.209	2.338	2.304	2.274	2.239
2ª Parte	Media	5.63	5.42	5.73	5.89	5.92	5.72
	E.T.	.06745	0.0670	.07162	.07056	.06935	.06850
	D.T.	2.330	2.313	2.474	2.438	2.396	2.366
Total Ponderado	Media	5.66	5.45	5.75	5.92	5.94	5.74
	E.T.	0.0663	0.0660	0.0705	0.0695	0.0683	.06754

(criterio: rating criterion; Alcance:communicative extent; Corrección gramatical: grammar accuracy; Interacción: Interaction; Coherencia: coherence; 1ª parte: First Task (interaction with interviewer about general topics); 2ª parte: Second task (picture description); Total: average of grades per section; Total Ponderado: student's average per criterion).

One of the significant reasons why the results may be higher is because many teachers have their own expectations of how students will do in the test. That cliché has such an impact in the teachers' opinions that the scores are usually almost pre-fixed. Teachers may have in mind that students will be performing around the B1 level because that is the competence that most students should have. And even when they do not reach it, that competence is given for granted. As a consequence, variations in rating are limited both for the good and bad.

1.1. Teachers' attitudes

Spanish teachers have insisted on the need of introducing a speaking task in the PAU test for many years (García Laborda & Fernández Álvarez, 2012). According to many of them, teachers believe that their students' competence is not as high. Currently, teachers believe that if in the near future there would be a speaking task the preparation should begin as soon as three years before, just for that test. It is thus easy to think that either teachers do not believe on what students are learning in class or they just simply do not trust their own teaching. If this is the case, it is necessary to begin to change the way they look at what they do in class. In principle, the teachers face two main issues: the observed situation in the classroom and a natural anxiety or fear to new tasks (and the responsibilities along). Overall, Figure 1 shows the relation between the foreseen expected feelings towards the test and the knowledge of the current situation in L2 in grade 12th.

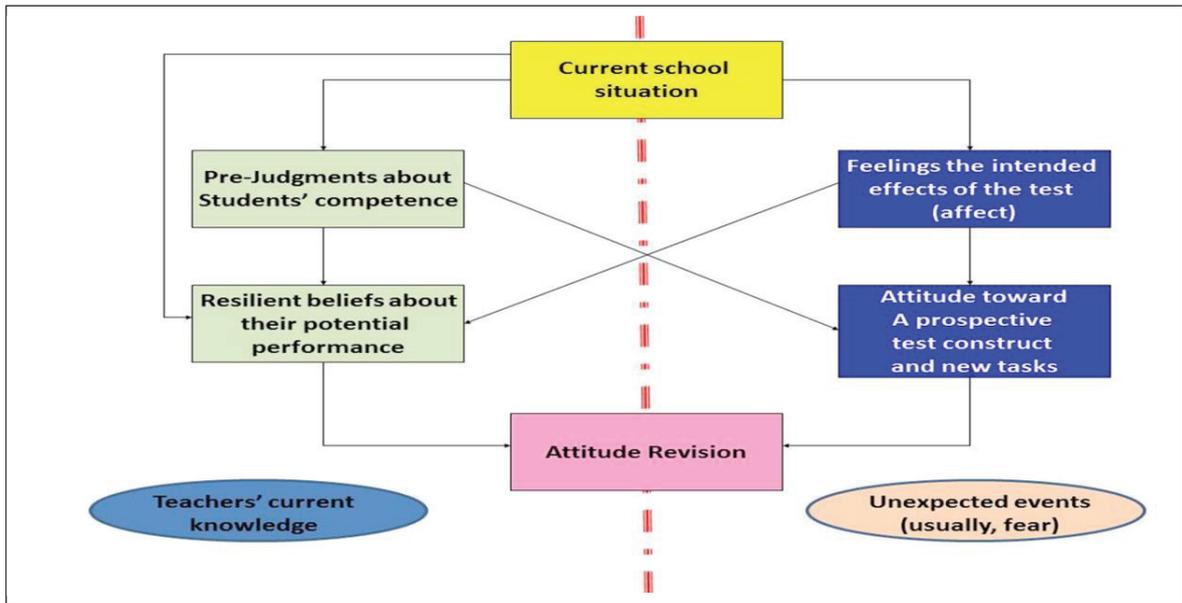


Figure 3. the relation between the foreseen expected feelings towards the test and the knowledge of the current situation in L2 in grade 12th

Teachers' attitudes towards the test have a self-defensive function towards the unknown. They also have an evaluative function to measure the effort to change their teaching. As a consequence, if teachers are to change their attitudes, there are three main ways:

- a. Teachers should believe that their students will be able to get acceptable grades and that they will benefit from the new test;
- b. Teachers should have the knowledge and information to know that their current teaching is coherent with the demanded changes by the new test;
- c. Teachers need to feel the obligation imposed by an up-to-down imposition (from the Ministry of Education, Culture & Sports).

2. Getting to change

In order to implement the teachers' change, the OPENPAU project suggested a number of issues that must be addressed by the different stakeholders:

2.1 From the Ministry:

- a. Full information on the test, context, conditions and rating must be provided in advance even before the students begin the courses that will lead them to the test;
- b. The Ministry has to make teachers believe that the changes have positive effects not only in their own students but for the whole population (i.e. because speaking English permits obtaining a job more easily);
- c. Teaching speaking can also be personally satisfactory if better levels are achieved and classes become dynamic.

2.2 From the school:

- a. The schools should be autonomous enough to develop their own benchmarks in language learning;
- b. The effort should be rewarded and compensated if not economically, at least, though a serious exercise of gratitude to their teachers;

Additionally, it is important to predict that the change will be successful as well as useful thus it will justify the time, financial resources and the personal involvement. The OPENPAU also observed that if teachers assume the consequences of not changing and integrating the speaking tasks, the situation in and out of class, and while and after school are even worse than the change itself, they may also will to implement the change. Some test traits may also have stronger influence in promoting the change. Table 1 shows this aspect:

Table 1. Test traits that affect attitude change

Trait	Effects if the speaking test is implemented
Changes in teaching style	Does not make me do great changes (+)
Teaching materials	Totally new materials are necessary (-)
The test construct	Benefit an even development of all the skills (+)
Effects in general improvement	It will be better as soon as possible (+) but also harder for all the stakeholders (-)
Delivery	Easy delivery for students (+) but also extra rating work for the teachers (-)
Effect in teaching (washback)	The test may bring benefits for the entire population (+)

3. Conclusions

The PAU test must change but motivating teachers and providing them with the right means to change is necessary. The new test should be accessible to the teachers and imply significant benefits both for the teacher and the students. Thus, the test, should have a positive effect in teaching and improve the students' competence in English with a view to be useful in their lives. To conclude, if teachers can see how the test will benefit the general panorama of education, they will probably be happy to change their attitudes and motivation.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to express their gratitude to the Ministry of Research and Innovation of Spain (MICINN) for supporting the development and implementation OPENPAU research project (FFI2011-22442) with cofounding with ERDF funds under the 2008-2011 plan.

References

- García Laborda, J. (2010). ¿Necesitan las universidades españolas una prueba de acceso informatizada? El caso de la definición del constructo y la previsión del efecto en la enseñanza para idiomas extranjeros. *Revista de orientación y Psicopedagogía*, 21(1),71-80.
- García Laborda, J. y Fernández Álvarez, M. (2012). Actitudes de los profesores de Bachillerato de Alcalá y Navarra ante la preparación y efecto de la PAU. *Revista de Educación*, 357, 29-54.
- Weir, C. J. (2005). *Language testing and validation: An evidence-based approach*. New York, NY: MacMillan.