
Diagnostic Assessment in the EFL Classroom: Points to Consider

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ABSTRACT

Seeking to emphasize quality education, the present paper deals with how to conduct diagnostic assessment in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, in order to ultimately ensure quality education for all to learn and gain.

Diagnostic assessment is a strategy which comprises the systematic gathering of information about students' attainment, so that students' strengths and weaknesses are identified and used as a foundation for classroom activities. Diagnostic assessment provides instructors with a tool to cater for the individual needs of students to facilitate noticeable, measurable progress. In order for this tool to function effectively, the paper pinpoints a number of points to consider whilst conducting diagnostic assessment.

Below is a list of the questions addressed as well as points discussed in the paper.

1. What does diagnostic assessment involve?
2. What are the different methods of diagnostic assessment?
3. Diagnostic assessment strategy development.
4. Key elements of diagnostic assessment.
5. Educational activities.
6. Suggestions for effective classroom management.
7. The cultural and social impact of diagnostic assessment.
8. Diagnostic test for university students: proposed specifications.

It is hoped that the current paper is of genuine interest and use to the practitioners within the field of language assessment from around the world.

Keywords: Diagnostic Assessment, EFL

INTRODUCTION

Seeking to emphasise quality education, the present paper deals with how to conduct diagnostic assessment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, in order to ultimately ensure quality education for all to learn and gain.

Diagnostic assessment is a strategy which comprises the systematic gathering of information about students' attainment, so that students' strengths and weaknesses are identified and used as a foundation for classroom activities. Diagnostic assessment provides instructors with a tool to cater for the individual needs of students to facilitate noticeable, measurable progress. In order for this tool to function effectively, the paper pinpoints a number of points to consider whilst conducting diagnostic assessment.

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DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT-DEFINITION AND AIMS

This part of the current paper is intended to explain diagnostic assessment in terms of definition and aims.

What is Diagnostic Assessment?

Diagnostic assessment is a strategy which comprises the systematic gathering of information about students' attainment, so that students' strengths and weaknesses are identified and used as a foundation for classroom activities (Al Alami: 2010).

Diagnostic assessment provides instructors with a tool to cater for the individual needs of students to facilitate noticeable, measurable progress.

Main Aims

Diagnostic assessment aims to ensure quality education through:

- facilitating learning for all students
- developing and implementing a whole assessment strategy
- Having a desirable change in the outcomes of the teaching-learning process.

What does Diagnostic Assessment Involve?

Diagnostic assessment involves:

- identifying the common difficulties of a class or a group within a class
- identifying the needs of each individual student in the class
- recognizing the needs of low achieving students
- recognizing the needs of high achieving students
- Drawing on several sources of assessment information through taking a closer look at what students are learning, as well as the ways in which they are learning.

Practitioners should use diagnostic assessment before, during, and after teaching. They should use diagnostic assessment:

- regularly as part of their standard teaching program
- to evaluate the needs of individuals or groups or the whole class; for example, at the beginning of a new unit, or to assess whether a basic concept has been fully grasped by all students
- to look more closely at the individuals or groups or class as a whole
- when individuals, groups, or the whole class seem to be having difficulties
- when a formal assessment has revealed a common difficulty
- when attainment is to be checked before moving on to new areas or activities
- When individuals or groups have mastered a concept or a skill and need additional work to challenge them.

METHODS OF DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

To adequately cover the main issue, Part Three presents different methods of diagnostic assessment which can be employed, components which should be assessed, and a diagnostic assessment strategy which can be implemented,

What are the Different Methods of Diagnostic Assessment?

Diagnostic assessment can be formal as well as informal. Examples of formal assessment are tests and examinations, and examples of informal assessment are observation; questioning; self-assessment; peer-assessment; and projects (Al Alami: 2008).

What Components Should be Assessed?

Any language program has two main components; namely, language skills and language elements. Assessment should concentrate on the ability of the student to express facts, ideas, feelings, and attitudes clearly and with ease-in speech and in writing- and his/her ability to understand what he/she hears and reads (Ministry of Education: 1991).

Diagnostic Assessment Strategy Development

An assessment strategy is a statement of intent, not a guide for practice. It is dynamic; it should influence practice and practice should influence it. It is more effective when all parties involved in the teaching/learning process have participated in its development (Al Alami: 2008).

An assessment strategy should:

- be manageable
- be for all students
- assist the teaching/learning process
- use a range of assessment techniques
- be shared as appropriate with students, parents, principals, and other instructors
- reinforce what students can do
- Identify what students cannot do to enable teaching to be focused.

KEY ELEMENTS OF DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

The five key elements of diagnostic assessment are planning, teaching and learning, recording, reporting, and evaluating. This part of the paper deals with each element along with the related success indicators (Al Alami: 2010).

Planning

Planning for assessment should look at the information obtained from assessing students' previous work.

Planning for assessment involves:

- evaluating previous learning to judge whether the aims of the teaching/learning process have been achieved
- establishing clear aims for the unit of work
- identifying what can and should be assessed
- deciding on what different kinds of evidence of attainment can be expected from students
- choosing suitable assessment activities to obtain evidence of attainment
- establishing clear and simple criteria to apply to each assessment activity
- deciding when and how learning aims and assessment criteria can be shared with students and parents
- Deciding how the results of assessment will be recorded.

Indicators for Evaluating Planning for Assessment

When instructors have planned for assessment, they can use the following criteria to evaluate their plans.

- The statements of learning objectives for students are clear enough for achievement and progress to be identified.

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- The lesson plans are used to give feedback from previous assessment.
- A realistic judgment is made of the learning aims to be assessed during a certain period of time.
- The number of students to be assessed during a period of time is manageable and appropriate for the day/week/semester/year.
- The selection of assessment points and students to be assessed reflects the frequency of opportunities available.
- The assessment planned during a certain time fits into an overall plan for covering all students in all relevant learning outcomes.
- The methods planned for the collection of information about students are realistic in the timescale.
- The optimum use is made of normal class work for assessment purposes.
- The plan includes opportunities for student self-assessment.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is based on planning. It provides evidence to allow recording, reporting, and evaluating to take place.

Assessment as part of teaching should be used to:

- improve students’ opportunities for effective learning
- build students’ confidence
- produce appropriate evidence to make decisions about the next step in learning
- Help instructors modify/adapt their own teaching styles.

Effective assessment is based upon:

- what students say
- what students write
- what students do
- what parents as well as practitioners say or write about students
- What students feel.

Indicators for Evaluating Assessment as Part of Teaching and Learning

The following indicators can be used to evaluate assessment as part of teaching and learning.

- The teaching of planned work should cover the aims to be assessed.
- At certain points in the teaching of the lesson, information that can promote learning is gathered.
- Alternative methods are used for assessment if planned ones are not feasible or productive.
- Planned information is gathered and followed up where it is necessary to clarify students’ learning.
- Information is gathered about the context-both social and physical-of the students’ performance.
- Evidence is used in adapting activities so that learning can match the perceived needs of the students.
- The assessment findings and interpretations are shared with the students and other instructors.
- The assessment has a positive impact on students’ activity and participation.

Recording

Recording involves documenting individual students’ achievement of objectives. Recording provides practitioners with all required information about each student’s attainment and progress. Such information can be reported to all parties concerned. These records should be as brief as possible.

Types of Recording

For the recording process to be effective, it should include:

- a succinct account of teaching and learning aims
- a brief indication of teaching methods which have been employed

- an indication of how class/groups have progressed
- An analysis of students’ common errors.

Prior to recording, an instructor should decide:

- what to record
- why to record
- when to record
- How to record.

Indicators for Evaluating Recording of Assessment

The following indicators can be used to evaluate the recording of assessment.

- Records of achievement and progress in relation to aims are distinct from records or activities undertaken.
- Information from observation, questioning and listening to students is recorded as soon as possible after the event.
- A record of assessment made at a certain time is compared with what has been planned.
- Records can be understood by students, other practitioners and parents.
- The records are used in short as well as long term planning to provide information for the development of differentiated learning activities for students.

Reporting

Reporting involves sharing the gathered assessment information with students, parents, and other practitioners. Reporting is based on planning for assessment and recording of students’ progress.

Reporting has many uses; for example, it can:

- help students identify what they have learned, what they will still have to learn, and what their next steps in learning may be
- inform parents and students of progress as well as respond to their comments
- Show parents how they can help their children to make further progress.

Prior to reporting, a practitioner should decide:

- what students will need
- what feedback should be given to students
- What feedback should be given to parents.

Indicators for Evaluating the Reporting Of Assessment

The following indicators can be used to evaluate the reporting of assessment.

- Feedback to students takes place regularly, face-to-face, as well as through written comments.
- Specific points about ways of improving performance are fed back to students in a positive manner.
- Reporting to parents provides opportunities for input from parents.
- Written reports are expressed in clear and specific language, giving details of progress made rather than general statements.
- Records passed on to other practitioners have a structure and detail to ensure continuity in learning.

Evaluating

Evaluating is reflecting on planning, teaching and learning, recording, and reporting, in order to judge their effectiveness. This is vital to ensure that sensible decisions are made about learning and teaching. Evaluating aims at reflecting on the instructional activities undertaken as well as on the

recording and reporting of students’ work. It provides information that will affect the learning process for the next step.

Indicators for Evaluating the Evaluation of Assessment

If instructors are able to judge the effectiveness of their planning and teaching, then this indicates that the evaluating of evaluation of assessment is effective.

Instructors can judge the effectiveness of their planning, teaching and learning, recording and reporting by reconsidering:

- what their students are learning effectively
- the pace of learning of each student
- the relevance of teaching for each student
- The appropriateness of resources.

It is essential that practitioners be able to consider the needs of students for future planning, teaching and learning, recording, and reporting. Based on a practitioner’s judgment, he/she may find that some teaching methods require modification, some skills need to be covered again in the next plan, some skills may need to be reinforced, some students may take better progress in a different grouping, or a particular concept has to be presented in a different way.

USING DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Looked at from a diagnostic approach to language teaching, the teaching process is divided into three stages: pre-teaching, teaching, and post-teaching (Al Alami: 2010). This part of the paper sheds light on the three stages as well as discusses three related points: classroom ongoing assessment, folder of evidence, and individual counseling.

Teaching Stages

Instructors should be able to judge the effectiveness of teaching practices by considering what their students are learning effectively, the pace of learning of each student, the relevance of teaching for each student, and the appropriateness of resources.

Pre-Teaching

At this stage, instructors should:

- identify the objectives to be achieved
- identify the students’ previous knowledge
- analyse the activities used in the textbook to achieve the different objectives
- identify the expected errors/difficulties
- estimate the amount of time required to ensure that objectives are realised
- decide whether students need to review previous work
- anticipate the expected difficulties and develop activities to support student achievement in those areas
- Decide when they are going to use the teaching/assessment/remedial/enrichment materials, as well as whether the responses are going to be recorded.

Teaching

At this stage, instructors are recommended to adopt the following steps.

- Review previous work if required.
- Note the areas of difficulty to be addressed during teaching the new instructional material.
- Introduce the new instructional material.
- Teach the objectives ensuring that the expected learning difficulties and previous achievement of the students are taken into consideration.

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- Assess the understanding of the students either by using an exercise in the textbook or additional activities.
- Identify any new errors.

Post-Teaching

At this stage, instructors are advised to:

- record the new difficulties if any have been identified
- decide whether anything needs to be done to handle these difficulties
- amend the activities if necessary.

Classroom Ongoing Assessment: Essential Points

Classroom ongoing assessment is an integral part of diagnostic assessment, and as such, the teaching/learning process. Below is a list of some essential points which instructors have to consider in relation to classroom ongoing assessment (Ministry of Education: 1997).

- Ongoing assessment is not a series of tests.
- Assessment activities occur all the time in the normal work of the class; they do not have to be special extras.
- The progress of each student should constantly be monitored.
- Noting how a student manipulates the language in any part of class activity can be made as simple as making a tick on paper exercise as instructors go round the class; it does not have to take up extra time.
- Having ongoing notation of students’ performance gives better motivation to the students to pay more attention, which therefore will have a formative effect on their learning.
- The existence of such a log helps the instructor to diagnose how effective he/she is, at giving all the students chances to participate. It reduces the risk of weaker or more reticent students being overlooked, and of brighter and more willing students being dominant.
- Students themselves should be asked to self evaluate their progress in English, using some appropriate charts. It is recommended that students have a role in the informal assessment process. For example, they can be divided into sub committees of a class assessment board, to be responsible for discussing the assessment process in class.

Folder of Evidence

One method which can often be put forward for building up evidence of achievement is a folder of work (Al Alami: 2010).

The following are some of the questions that need to be addressed.

- Who is it for?
- How will it help the student?
- What goes into it?
- How will it be updated?
- How will the students be involved in the selection and replacement of the instructional materials?

In managing the folders of work, instructors should consider how, when, and by whom items are entered in the folder. The balance of content should reflect the breadth and balance of curriculum, attainment targets, progress over time, and personal achievement.

Instructors have to annotate the work indicating the date, the context, and the reason for including the work. Some criteria for assessing may include evidence showing progression over time, evidence of significant achievement, and evidence across levels.

Comments and marking should be in the form of a dialogue with the student. They should be positive, indicate clear targets for future work, and involve the student.

Individual Counseling

As soon as possible in the year, instructors should try to have an individual counselling session with each student. This offers opportunities for:

- getting to know the students
- showing the students that the instructor is aware of them as individuals
- involving the students in self-evaluation
- motivating the students
- advising the students
- checking assignments/projects
- Answering individual questions.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Educational activities-whether curricular, non-curricular, remedial, follow up, enrichment, etc- play a significant role in the teaching/learning process. This part of the paper deals with educational activities in relation to main types as well as appropriate characteristics, and presents some examples which can be of use to EFL students (Al Alami: 2008).

Educational Activities: Main Types

Educational activities provide students with a variety of approaches. Educational activities can be divided into:

- activities that contribute to a concept previously dealt with; for example, puzzles and games, role-play, and distinguishing grammatical patterns in different contexts
- activities that encourage analysing and relating different subjects; for example, sequencing parts of a story, classifying subjects, and problem-solving
- Activities that develop character; for example, quizzes and competitions, interviews, and community-oriented tasks.

Characteristics of Educational Activities

For educational activities to function effectively, they should:

- be timed
- have pedagogical objectives
- be competitive
- take into consideration the number of students
- encourage all students to participate
- Be practical in terms of time, cost, and effort.

Why Remedial and Enrichment Activities?

Besides the activities included in textbooks, it is essential that instructors set remedial and enrichment activities. Such activities:

- lower the element of anxiety
- create natural and creative interactions in the classroom
- offer a good criterion for evaluating students
- boost the self-confidence of students
- assist in the realisation of the values aimed at in the curriculum
- reinforce the learning of vocabulary, grammar, structure, spelling, etc.
- provide opportunities for acquiring new vocabulary, grammar, structure, spelling, etc.
- help students discover and develop their talents.

Remedial and Enrichment Activities: Some Examples

The following are some suggested activities, which can be presented to EFL students to enhance their language proficiency, whilst ensuring a motivating learning environment.

- Debates and discussions.
- Language games.
- Oral presentations.
- Role-plays.
- Free, semi-free, semi-structured, structured interviews.
- Problem-solving activities.
- Corresponding with English-speaking students in other countries.
- Improvisation-split exchange. Each student is given one half of a dialogue exchange. Students then circulate around the group, each saying his/her half of the dialogue to others until they find their partner. Having found their partner, they decide the situation and bring the conversation to a logical conclusion (Ali: 2007).
- Journal writing-a letter to the teacher. Writing letters to the teacher is an important form of free writing which can be used to achieve several objectives. Writing letters means asking students to write a weekly/monthly letter on any subject and in any form they choose. The teacher comments briefly, avoiding the same way he/she usually corrects a composition. Some of the advantages which this kind of writing can achieve are: firstly, letters help the teacher understand the way his/her students think. Secondly, letters give the teacher a very good idea about the frequent language errors his/her students make. Thirdly, letters encourage students to read in order to find amazing facts, news, etc. Fourthly, psychologically, letters are relaxing; students can release a great deal of their anger through writing. Fifthly, a spirit of healthy competition can be encouraged by assigning the letter of the week.
- Project work. Project work is a creative as well as extensive work, topic-based, and open-ended. The essence of the project is that it is the student who does the work. Some of its advantages are: firstly, it enables students to learn new facts. In terms of communication, it encourages students to use a wide range of skills outside the artificial environment of the classroom. As far as the educational side is concerned, it helps students build values and attitudes, as well as develop a sense of creativity; cooperation; autonomy; inquiry; appreciation of culture and responsibility. Finally, project work is a motivating work for it gives a high sense of achievement, provides a rich experience, and creates a positive learning cycle. Whilst working on a project, an instructor has to make sure that the basic materials needed for the project are available, give his/her students a clear model of what they should do, as well as prepare them in terms of language skills and content.
- Poetry writing. Four suggested types are word poems, line poems, acrostic poems, and limericks. A word poem is a three-line long poem, in which each word starts with the same letter. The first word is a noun; the second word is a verb; and the third word is an adverb. A line poem, on the other hand, is five lines long. The first line is the subject. Five adjectives are needed then; two on the second line and three on the third. On the fourth line, a statement/phrase about the subject is needed. And on the fifth line, the name of the subject has to be repeated. As far as acrostic poems are concerned, a key word has to be chosen and written down the left hand side of the page. Students then have to write a poem about the key word, in which each line begins with a letter of the key word. Limericks, by contrast, are humorous poems which begin by introducing a person and a place. They rhyme A A B B A, and have a strong rhythm. Below are four examples; one for each type mentioned above.

Word Poems

Children

Chatter

Chattily.

Line poems

Dogs
Delightful, loyal,
Faithful, friendly, guarding,
They could be dangerous though,
Dogs.

Acrostic poems

Silver, satin, silent,
No noise except crunch, crunch,
O'er hill and dale it stays,
Waiting for sunny days.

Limericks

There was a young man from Amman,
who drove at high speed in his van.
He couldn't go slow,
which to him was a blow,
since all he has now is a ban!

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Successful classroom management is essential for successful learning. To ensure an inspiring learning environment, classroom management should encourage all students to learn. Below are some points to consider (Ministry of Education: 2000).

Classroom Ethos

Instructors should ensure the following points.

- Fairness. It is important to be fair to all students in order to gain their respect. Any signs of favoritism or unfair treatment of a student will cause the teacher to lose credibility.
- Assertive Discipline System. Instructors can use a tracking sheet which has each student's name and the days of the week, to mark any behaviour problems that students may cause.
- Rules. Instructors are advised to discuss with the students, the rules they think should be observed in the classroom. A maximum of seven rules could be set. The fewer the rules, the easier it is not to break them.
- Mutual Respect. Instructors have to respect all students, never confronting or humiliating them in front of their peers. In addition, instructors have to provide a warm, friendly environment.

Classroom Physical Environment

Instructors should ensure that:

- the classroom is as clean as possible
- the board is well-maintained
- the desks/chairs are set out to make the maximum use of the space
- there is provision for students' work to be displayed attractively on the walls
- there is storage for records, equipment, etc.

Classroom Groups

Group work can help to increase students' talking time, enable speaking practice and encourage fluency in spoken language, build confidence, increase student autonomy, motivate students, as well

as develop peer contact by initiating conversation; clarifying difficulties; and correcting errors. Group work can also promote the development of conversation skills. Students need to develop a range of conversation skills which can be effectively practised and developed in group work. These skills include: asking for clarification, asking for agreement, bringing others into a discussion, reverting to a previous topic, initiating topic changes, and chairing a discussion (Ministry of Education: 2002).

Groups can be arranged according to ability/mixed ability, objectives of the task/activity, physical environment of the classroom, number of the students in the class, as well as availability of the resources provided. To develop group methods with a class, instructors should introduce new groupings when appropriate, practice them until the students feel comfortable, and then move on to new groupings that fit the needs of the students and the content of lessons being taught.

Below is a suggested procedure for developing group work.

First, instructors have to plan a lesson for the groups considering the:

- lesson objectives for the groups
- lesson activities for the groups
- group composition
- time necessary for the activities to be completed.
- Next, instructors have to plan their teaching, ensuring that students:
 - know which group they belong to
 - understand the instructions/activities/ tasks
 - understand their roles
 - know the expected outcomes
 - know the time available to complete the work.

Prior to conducting group work, students need to know the task, to know enough language, and to know any essential vocabulary and structures. Time spent in setting up group work should be well invested to ensure that group work is effective. If an instructor has to interrupt group work to repeat instructions, almost certainly the setting up has not been done carefully enough.

To function effectively in groups, a number of roles should be assigned for group discussions; namely, group leader, recorder, reporter, observer, and time-keeper. In addition, students should learn the standards of *happy talk*, *active listening*, and *everyone participates*. Consistent use of these standards is expected to provide a comfortable positive atmosphere, in which students are willing to share ideas and work together. Furthermore, instructors should seek to empower classroom groups by all possible means. Amongst such means are ensuring healthy competitions, emphasising diversity of curriculum, having groups set their own aims, helping students help each other, providing immediate and clear feedback, alleviating students' fears, and allowing for student-centred activities.

To support students whilst working in groups, an instructor has to bear in mind the significant role the reward system plays. Rewards have the most effect if they are given immediately after an activity has been performed well. Types of rewards that can be given are praise, points, certificates, and cumulative rewards. (Ministry of Education: 2001).

As far as *praise* is concerned, it is recommended that instructors praise groups for:

- following directions
- transition into an activity
- listening attentively
- beginning work right away
- asking questions when unsure
- working co-operatively
- good effort on activity
- sharing
- being sensitive to others' feelings.

ROLES OF MAIN PARTIES INVOLVED

This part highlights the roles which main parties involved in diagnostic assessment should play, to ensure quality education (Al Alami: 2008).

The Role of Inspectors/Supervisors

Inspectors/Supervisors should consider the following points.

- Contribute to enriching classroom environment.
- Cooperate with head teachers and teachers in setting a comprehensive assessment for their schools.
- Help head teachers and teachers overcome difficulties which may be related to implementing diagnostic assessment.
- Propose appropriate suggestions for developing diagnostic assessment.
- Share in ongoing evaluation of diagnostic assessment.
- Participate in setting curriculum plans.

The Role of Head Teachers

Head teachers should stress the following points.

- Offer encouragement and support.
- Provide teachers with the materials they require.
- Conduct training workshops and hold meetings regularly.
- Develop and implement a whole school strategy of diagnostic assessment.
- Monitor the teachers' diagnostic assessment and make use of the information it provides.

The Role of Instructors

Instructors should ensure the following points.

- Implement the diagnostic assessment approach to language teaching and assessment.
- Consult with the parties involved, when needed.
- Monitor and assess the success of the instructional methods they are using.
- Develop assessment and teaching activities.
- Hold discussions with all students about the instructional methods they are practising.
- Inform students of their role in the classroom.
- Maintain a record of each student's success and difficulties.
- Prepare an error analysis throughout the academic year.

The Role of Textbooks

Instructors should bear in mind the following points.

- Recognise the value of the textbook as a vital learning tool. However, over-dependence on textbooks should be avoided.
- View the textbook as a means not an end. Such a means should be supported by a number of meaningful activities which are related to the aims of the lesson.
- Prepare additional material and activities, where necessary.

The Role of Parents

Parents should meet the following requirements.

- Have an effective role in the teaching/learning process.
- Be aware of their responsibilities towards their children.

- Know the success criteria of performances.
- Know the aims of assessment process.
- Participate in enriching the learning environment.
- Cooperate in solving problems.

The Role of Students

Students should emphasize the following points.

- Have a positive and effective role in the process of their learning.
- Be aware of their responsibilities towards their learning.
- Recognize the teaching aims for the various language units.
- Recognize the required level of performance.
- Know the success criteria of performances.
- Know the aims of assessment process.
- Participate in enriching the class environment.
- Cooperate in solving problems.
- Aim to strive for maximum potential.
- Select the suitable learning methods for promoting their attainment level.

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

With its expansion across the globe, English has occupied a significant academic position, thus becoming a universal requirement which EFL students have to meet apart from their areas of specialization. To help EFL students meet such a universal requirement, practitioners need to present language which is solidly contextualized, as well as sensitize students to the ways in which the discourse presents its context (Gilmore: 2007). However, since each culture is unique, each classroom is also unique. This requires the need to adopt an eclectic approach in which diagnostic assessment has a significant role to play, in order to meet individual students' needs whilst considering the social and cultural context in which language is used.

Language learning success is assessed neither in terms of accurate grammar for its own sake, nor in terms of explicit knowledge of the rules, but by the ability to do things with the language fluently, appropriately, and accurately. The crucial point to be taken into account in EFL contexts is how to develop a smooth transition between skill-getting and skill-using (Al Alami: 2008). To create an effective learning environment; therefore, a diagnostic assessment approach has to have a significant role in EFL contexts.

As previously explained, diagnostic assessment requires that different parties be involved in the teaching/learning process. It is through this involvement that challenges can be met; requirements can be fulfilled; and demands can be satisfied. Diagnostic assessment; then, has a significant social as well as cultural impact, for it requires this active involvement of different parties, requiring coordination and respect amongst all concerned. The ever-lasting impact, as a result, is this mutual respect and coordination amongst different parties in society, which in turn, will ensure quality education for all to learn and earn.

DIAGNOSTIC TEST FOR EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

This part of the current paper presents the proposed specifications as well as assessment criteria for EFL diagnostic tests. Both sub-parts are followed by tables for clarification purposes.

Proposed Specifications

The specifications provided in this part of the paper are proposed for EFL diagnostic tests, which can be administered to university students studying a general English course as a university requirement.

Firstly, the listening component includes two parts; namely, mini-dialogues and short talks; both on general topics. Secondly, the talking component consists of three tasks. The first task requires that

students introduce themselves giving adequate background, the second task requires a short talk on a topic of a general nature, and the third task requires argumentative discussions. Thirdly, the reading component is comprised of three texts; each of which is approximately four hundred words. Fourthly, the writing component requires writing three essays: narrative; descriptive and expository. Each essay should be of approximately two hundred words. Table One below reveals the proposed specifications in relation to each of the four language skills.

Table1. *Test Specifications*

Component	Skill	Question type	Weight (100%)	Time allotted (2 hours)
Listening	1.1 Identifying the main idea. 1.2 Identifying major points. 1.3 Recognising a speaker’s purpose. 1.4 Recognizing a speaker’s attitude. 1.5 Recognizing the organization of information. 1.6 Comprehending the relationships between ideas. 1.7 Making connections among pieces of information. 1.8 Making inferences based on what is implied in the listening material.	Multiple-choice	20 %	20 minutes
Talking	2.1 Responding to questions, offering adequate information. 2.2 Discussing ideas in an organised manner. 2.3 Manipulating a range of structures; grammar and vocabulary, as appropriate. 2.4 Expressing personal opinions effectively.	- Information questions - Short talks - Argumentative discussions	20 %	20 minutes
Reading	3.1 Identifying the main idea. 3.2 Identifying major points. 3.3 Recognizing the writer’s purpose. 3.4 Recognizing the writer’s attitude. 3.5 Recognizing the organization of information. 3.6 Comprehending the relationships between ideas. 3.7 Recognizing the use and usage of different grammatical structures. 3.8 Guessing meaning of lexical items. 3.9 Making connections among pieces of information. 3.10 Making inferences based on what is implied in the reading text.	Multiple-choice	30 %	40 minutes
Writing	4.1 Following the conventions of spelling, punctuation, and layout. 4.2 Manipulating structure, grammar and vocabulary accurately. 4.3 Using appropriate linking expressions to connect pieces of information. 4.4 Identifying one main idea and adequate supporting points. 4.5 Discussing ideas in an organized manner. 4.6 Developing the essay by using relevant examples/facts/reasons/details.	Essay writing	30 %	40 minutes

Evaluation Criteria

As mentioned above, both listening and reading questions are multiple-choice while talking and writing questions require that students produce language in stretches of discourse. This part highlights a number of points which examiners have to consider when evaluating students’ writing and talking performance.

Matters of Choice

Examiners should consider the effectiveness of the total impression created by a student’s voice and the extent to which his/her language performance demonstrates control of diction, syntax and grammar. The language manipulated should be skillfully structured and fluent: diction is appropriate and effective; syntax and grammar are both controlled and varied.

Thought and detail

Examiners should consider how effectively a student’s ideas relate to the assignment, what evidence has been used to support and develop the thesis, what thesis or unifying ideas are developed, as well as the quality of the unifying ideas.

Matters of correctness

Examiners should consider the correctness of sentence construction (completeness, consistency, subordination, coordination); usage (accurate use of words according to convention and meaning); grammar (agreement of subject-verb/pronoun, antecedent pronoun reference, consistency of tense); mechanics (punctuation, spelling, capitalization). Proportion of error to complexity and length of response must also be considered.

Table Two below shows the proposed talking assessment and Table Three the proposed writing assessment.

Table2. *Talking Assessment*

Score (20)	Topic development	Delivery	Language use
17-19	-Well developed and coherent responses. - Clear progression of ideas.	- Clear speech. - Well paced flow. - Almost no difficulties with intonation and pronunciation patterns.	- Effective use of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Wide range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Minor errors.
14-16	-Mostly well developed and coherent responses. -Generally clear progression of ideas.	- Generally clear speech. - Some fluidity of expression. - Minor difficulties with intonation and pronunciation patterns.	- Generally effective use of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Adequate range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - A few errors.
12-15	- Response is connected to the task. - Fairly coherent and clear.	- Basically intelligible speech. - Meaning is obscured in places. - Some difficulties with intonation and pronunciation patterns.	- Fairly adequate control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Fairly adequate range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Some inaccurate use of structures, grammar and vocabulary.
8-11	- Limited relevant content. - Lack of coherence or clarity.	- Fairly intelligible speech. - Delivery is choppy. - Difficulties with intonation and pronunciation patterns.	- Limited control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Frequent inaccurate use of structures, grammar and vocabulary.
4-7	- Generally irrelevant content. - Almost incoherent and unclear.	- Mostly unclear speech. - Delivery is choppy or telegraphic. - Severe difficulties with intonation and pronunciation patterns.	- Very limited control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Very limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Almost inaccurate structures, grammar and vocabulary.
1-3	- Irrelevant content. - Incoherent and unclear.	- Unclear speech. - Delivery is choppy and telegraphic. - No control of intonation and stress patterns.	- Severely limited control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Too limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Inaccurate structures, grammar and vocabulary.
0	No attempt to respond.	No attempt to respond.	No attempt to respond.

Table3. *Writing Assessment*

Score(30)	Topic development	Language use
26-29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effectively addresses the topic. - Displays unity and coherence. - Well developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well organized. - Effective and adequate use of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Wide range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Minor errors.
21-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generally addresses the topic. - Generally displays unity and coherence. - Generally well-developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generally well-organized. - Adequate use of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Adequate range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - A few errors.
16-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fairly addresses the topic, as appropriate. - Fairly displays unity and coherence, as required. - Fairly well-developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fairly well-organized. - Relatively limited control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Relatively limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Some inaccurate use of structures, grammar and vocabulary.
11-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not address the topic adequately. - Limited connection of ideas. - Limited development in response to the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lacks organization in places. - Limited control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Frequent inaccuracy of structures, grammar and vocabulary.
6-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mostly irrelevant. - Lacks unity and coherence. - Serious underdevelopment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serious disorganization. - Severely limited control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Severely limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Mostly inaccurate structures, grammar and vocabulary.
1-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Irrelevant. - Incoherent. - Severely serious underdevelopment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Severely serious disorganization. - No control of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Too limited range of structures, grammar and vocabulary. - Inaccurate structures, grammar and vocabulary.
0	No attempt to write.	No attempt to write.

CONCLUSION

With quality education in mind, the current paper highlights the role diagnostic assessment plays in the English classroom. The current paper begins by giving a brief yet adequate definition of what diagnostic assessment is. To achieve the intended aim, the current paper proceeds to discuss a number of points relating to the effective conduct of diagnostic assessment in the English classroom such as those of key elements of diagnostic assessment, educational activities and classroom management.

To end with, it is the author’s hope that EFL practitioners consider employing a diagnostic assessment approach whilst teaching, so that each and every student’s academic needs are well taken care of and catered for.

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