

Introduction

For my final project, I chose to create and design test items from a reading selection, which assesses reading comprehension skills. As a teacher my purposes are to

1) experience the test development process 2) better understand a teacher's thinking while creating test items. My first step in creating a test was to decide on a specific target group and the context in which a test would be appropriate. My target group is: International students who are taking ESL courses at Kapiolani Community College. These ESL Non-credit courses are designed with various themes integrated into their English development curriculum. Due to my experiences in ESL courses at KCC, it was not difficult to visualize the nature of KCC classes and the student ethnicity, proficiency level, and performance. By clearly determining the audience, context, and purposes, it is easier to justify the validity and reliability of the intended test. The purpose and outcome of this project is to determine students' reading achievement level, including student ability of different types of reading comprehension.

Rationale:

For International students, there are many reasons for entering an ESOL class (English as a Second Language) such as development of academic skills, preparation for regular class, and meeting of students' academic goals. Since ESOL classes are non-credit, international students who attend ESOL classes hope to be better prepared in the shift to regular classes. From the teaching perspective, the goal of ESOL classes is to develop students' English proficiency to an adequate level, academic ensuring smoother transition and success in a regular classroom.

ESOL Course Description

What kinds of ESOL classes are offered to these international students? Basically content-based programs are designed to develop students' English proficiency. According to the Kapiolani Community College website, "A variety of content-based classes help students to develop their academic English proficiencies. By gaining many opportunities for language practice and interaction, students can take control of their language development." ESOL courses are offered each semester: spring, fall, and summer with a specific topic given to each semester. For example, in the spring semester, the instructor will introduce the topic of "Language" by covering various topics related to language. The content to be covered may include linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language usage. By the end of the semester, students should have knowledge and skills, somewhat like a specialist about the language.

Test Content and Design

In this unit of study student will learn about global environmental issues such as water pollution, air pollution, and natural disasters, specifically earthquakes. Moreover, students are expected to have general reading comprehension skills such as stating the main idea, identifying the supporting details, and defining the conclusion. In addition, they should begin understanding and applying inference skills. Since inferences skills contain many definitions and have different perspectives, it will hereafter be defined as "critical reading". For my project, I will develop a reading comprehension test which includes various types of comprehension items. This test is a follow-up to a unit of study on the environment, including various articles. During a series of lessons, students are expected to read several

articles about the environment, understand the basic facts and information provided, and know the vocabulary definitions of key words. Students are also expected to think critically about the issues of the environment, and will be tested on higher level comprehension addressing, inferential, evaluative, and personal levels of comprehension. This written test will assess the students' ability and skills in comprehending, developing knowledge, and in formulating own opinions about the issues.

Forms of Questions

To assess student comprehension of the article, the major concepts, the facts and details, and relevant vocabulary on the environment, three forms of question were used:

- 1) wh-questions
- 2) multiple choice
- 3) short response

First, the wh-questions and multiple-choice questions will be used to cover literal facts and information, which measure students' ability to:

- 1) identify and comprehend the main idea and major concepts
- 2) identify and comprehend the supporting details, examples, and evidences used by the author
- 3) identify and comprehend the key vocabulary
- 4) identify and comprehend the conclusion of the article

According to Day & Park (2005), "[Wh-questions] are excellent in helping students with a literal understanding of the text, with recognizing information in the text" (66). Moreover, Day & Park (2005) also supports about the usage of multiple-choice, "multiple-choice

questions may be used most effectively, in our experience, with literal comprehension” (67).

For these reasons and evidences by experts, I believe wh-questions and multiple-choice questions are necessary and needed to check the students’ basic understanding and reading proficiency.

Secondly, short response test items were used to measure students’ critical reading and thinking applications. The purpose of these test items were to assess students’ comprehension of:

- 1) author’s intension
- 2) trust needs of author’s argument (author’s point of view)
- 3) personal opinion of the issues

Scoring of Short Response Items

The problem with these open ended test items is the difficulty in scoring them objectively. Perhaps a scoring criteria and rubric needs to be developed in order to provide a valid and accurate testing situation. Furthermore, for ESOL students, language expression and writing competence may interfere with the ability to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension. Moreover, asking personal question and opinion type of questions are difficult to score because I believe there are no correct or incorrect answer in regards to personal opinions. To be fair, I will propose providing questions as an extra credit item in order to check how students feel about their personal reaction. In short response questions I would not be strict about grammar or spelling errors, since the focus is on their critical

thinking skills. And finally, having students demonstrate their opinion is the strongest measure of the students' personal commitment and voice to the topic, saying "I believe".

Validity

To ensure validity of the test, the context in which the students are studying the semester long theme of environment, is important. The reading selection, the content and concepts, the vocabulary and reading level, need to correspond with other readings, in order to show accurate and valid achievement of student comprehension levels. In this case, the ESOL classes covered many related topics such as different types of pollution, the causes, the effects on the environment, and possible solutions to this world-wide issue. Through the on-going lectures and other readings, students are able to increase their information and issues about environment as well as the related vocabulary. Therefore, validity is ensured when the content and vocabulary in the test has been previously introduced and is familiar to them. Also, when responding to the short response questions, students have had many previous opportunities to think critically about the issues, and have formulated their own opinion. I thought about and tried to avoid trick questions and negative wording. Day & Park (2005) reinforces this idea and states, "such unclear or misleading questions tend to discourage students" (67). Careful sentence and phrasing of the multiple choice items was also important, in order to not confuse the student understanding of the choices. And finally, designing tests which reflects the basic principles of developing good quality of language test item.

Summary and Conclusions

In this project I was able to create and design test item from a reading selection, which assesses reading comprehension skills. I asked myself the following questions to assess my completion of this project.

The completion of test creation project has taught me several lessons:

Article selection

1) Did I choose an appropriate, valid, and reliable reading article?

Yes, the article

1) includes a topic which fits into the context of the course and curriculum

2) is well-written and informative

3) is well-organized including statement of problem, cause and effect and some recommendations

4) Uses language and vocabulary which is at the appropriate level for the intended audience

Test design

1) Did I design a test which included a variety of reading comprehension types, such as literal, inferential, evaluative, and personal questions?

Yes. this test included literal, inferential, evaluative and personal questions.

2) Did I provide for different formats and forms in the questions such as multiple choice, wh-questions, and short response?

Yes. I provided different formats and forms such as multiple choice, wh-questions, and short response test items.

3) Did I check for quality development of test items?

Yes I used textbook as a references to check the quality of test items.

4) Were there any unexpected lessons from this project assignment?

In designing the items and questions, I needed to challenge my own language and thinking skills. Using correct grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary choice became very important.

I am please and satisfied to able to answer my questions with "Yeses". In my future classroom, I will continue to use these questions when I create tests for my students.

References:

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