

The Effect of Assessment Techniques on EFL Learners' achievement in TOEFL Test

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Abstract

While many educators are highly focused on state test, it is important to consider that over the course of a year, instructors can build in many opportunities to assess how learners are learning. Therefore, assessment techniques are considered a good method to get benefit for both instructors and learners in the process of teaching and learning. The sample consists of 27 learners who participated in TOEFL training course in the Development and Continuous Education Centre. Validity and reliability were verified.

To fulfill the aims and verify the hypothesis which reads as follows" It is hypothesized that the TOEFL learners' scores will not be increased after TOEFL course training." T-test for two dependent samples is used to obtain the results. The analysis of the results shows that the learners' score in posttest and TOEFL ITP test is better than pretest. In the light of the results, several conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future study have been made.

تأثير تقنيات التقييم على تحصيل متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية في اختبار التوفل

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المخلص

بالرغم من أن العديد من المتعلمين يركزون على اختبار الدولة، يهتم المدرسون في كيفية استخدام تقنيات التقييم لتعليم الطلاب على مدار السنة. لذلك تعتبر تقنيات التقييم طريقه جوده في عملية التعلم والتعليم بالنسبه للطلاب والمدرسين. تتكون العينه من ٢٧ متعلم الذين شاركو في دورة التاهيل لاختبار التوفل حيث تم التحقق من صدق وثبات الاختبار. لتحقيق أهداف البحث والتحقق من الفرضية التي تنص على ما يلي " بأن درجات العديد من متعلمي دورة التوفل لن تزيد بعد التدريب في دورة التوفل التدريبيه ". الاختبار الثاني لعينتين غير مستقلتين استعملت للحصول على النتائج. اظهرت النتائج بان المتعلمين في الاختبار البعدي واختبار TOEFL أفضل من الاختبار القبلي. في ضوء النتائج، تم إجراء العديد من الاستنتاجات والتوصيات والمقترحات للدراسة في المستقبل.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Many people hear the word assessment and think it is "test". However, good assessment involves variety of techniques. These techniques are divided into formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment techniques monitor learner learning during the learning process. Feedback is used to identify areas where students are struggling so that instructors can adjust their teaching and learners can adjust their studying. (Methods of assessment, 2014:1)

While summative assessment techniques evaluate learners' learning that occur at the end of an instructional unit or course and measure the extent to which learners have achieved the desired learning outcomes (Ibid: 2). It is important to follow specific techniques such as (formative and summative) to facilitate the process of learning and to develop the Learners' level during TOEFL training course. As a result, learners will be prepared for final TOEFL test.

The purpose of the TOEFL test is to evaluate the English proficiency of people who are non –native speakers. In addition, international companies, government agencies, scholarship programme, and recruitment agencies use TOEFL scores to evaluate English proficiency.

1.2 Aims

- Discover the influence of formative and summative techniques in understanding structure and written expressions in TOEFL course.
- Evaluate the training course given to the learners.
- Compare the pre-test with the posttest scores.
- Compare the pretest scores with those of instructional testing program (Henceforth: ITP) TOEFL ITP test.

1.3 Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that TOEFL learners' scores will not be increased after TOEFL training course.

2 Limits

- This study is limited to learners at Center of Development and Continuous Education who took TOEFL training course during academic year 2012 \ 2013.
- The textbook is limited to “Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test “by Deborah Philips (2003) using technology in learning.
- The place of TOEFL training course is the Center of Development and Continuous Education \ University of Baghdad.

3 Definitions of Basic Terms

Assessment: Tennant (2012: 1) defines assessment as an “important aspect of teaching and learning, and it is the process of making a judgment or forming an opinion, after considering something or someone carefully”.

Formative Techniques: Opp-Beckman and Klinghammer(2014:104) define formative techniques as a “relatively informal assessment that takes place during the process of learning, as opposed to at the end. The purpose is to provide feedback, which helps the learning process”.

Summative Techniques: are given periodically to determine at a particular point in time what learners know and do not know. Many associate summative assessments only with standardized tests such as state assessments, but they are also used as an important part of district and classroom programs. Summative assessment at the district/classroom level is an accountability measure that is generally used as part of the grading process. (Ehringhaus and Garrison, 2014:3)

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Assessment of TOEFL Training Course

Thomas and Thomas (2013:1) summarize the main questions related to assess the course training as a whole during the course:

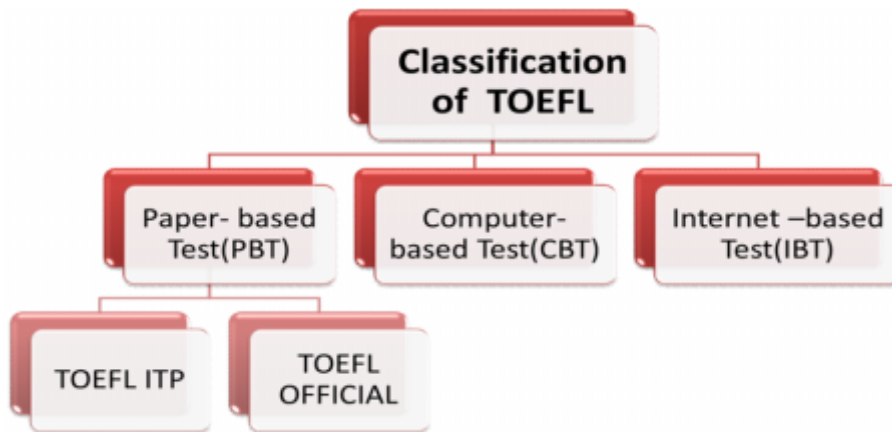
1. Reaction of the learners (do they like the course, what do they like about it, what do they dislike.)
Learning objectives are met, learning objectives are relevant, course content is realistic, training methods are suitable, facilitators are effective, and training environment is adequate.
2. Learning (what have they learned, have they learned what they are expected to learn)
What do they know before training? What do they know after training?

Is the knowledge what they are expected to know? (Observation/ reviewing data from simulated reports, plans, exercises and other documents)

All above points and questions will be discussed in details to assess TOEFL training course. Preparing for TOEFL training course is similar to any other English courses; the following elements explain the equipment and requirements of TOEFL training Course. Furthermore, the goal of TOEFL training course is to prepare learners for standard TOEFL ITP test and TOEFL Official test.

(Instructors, Textbook, Time and break, place, and extra materials)

The following diagram shows the types of TOEFL tests.



2.1.1 Instructors

In the center of Development and Continuous Education \ University of Baghdad , the staff members (who are specialized in English language and the researcher is one of them) prepare a training Course in TOEFL PBT five weeks per course for Iraqi learners to pass and get required score in TOEFL test. The goal of TOEFL training Course is to train the learners about 4 skills which helped them to increase their scores in TOEFL test. It is worth to mention that different instructors teach different skills because they do not have time to teach all skills together.

2.1.2 Textbook

The paper based test (PBT) is the only version which is available in Baghdad where IBT and CBT are not offered.

The syllabus is “Longman preparation Course for the TOEFL test “by Debora Philips (2003). The Course programme includes training about four skills (Listening Comprehension, structure and written Expression, Reading Comprehension and test of Written English). Besides five completed test with key answer for all exercises and test.

2.1.3 Time & Break

The time of training begins at 9:00 AM morning and ends at 12:30 PM evening every day from Sunday to Thursday per week for five weeks followed by posttest. In addition, the learners have taken 30 minutes from 10:30 to 11:00 am for break and have a tea with cookies.

2.1.4 Place

In fact, the place of training is held in Development and Continuous Education Center/ University of Baghdad.

2.1.5 Extra materials

Though the textbook covers four skills, learners need a variety of sources to increase their capacity, so that they depend on internet resources and tests to cover the gaps in learning besides textbook.

2.2 Four Skills

2.2.1 Listening Comprehension (L C)

In this section of the test, the learners have an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to understand conversations and talks in English. There are three parts in this section, with special direction for each part. Besides, there are 50 items in final test for LC with 35 minutes to answer them (Philips, 2003; 3).

In Longman, this skill is explained in detail and it contains a variety of materials that together provide a comprehensive TOEFL preparation program. The lectures of LC include pretest, language skills, Exercises, TOEFL exercises, and posttest.

In the first lecture, the instructor gave an overview about LC and applied Diagnostic pre-test to measure the learners' level of performance. Later on, the instructor has explained the skills from (1-3). In the second lecture, the learners were provided with language skills from (4-7) TOEFL exercises to measure their performance and progress in LC. Whereas in the third lecture, the learners were given language skills from (8 to 10).

At the end, the Final lecture composed of explanation of skills from (11_13) with TOEFL exercises and post test to measure the progress that learners have made after working through the skills and strategies in the text.

2.2.2 Reading Comprehension

This section is important because the time is limited for 55minutes to answer 50 questions. This section is designed to assess learners' ability to read and understand five passages in different subjects with questions about the passages.

In the first lecture, the instructor gave details about this section beginning with diagnostic pretest, general strategies with the strategies for reading comprehension; and then moved to explain the skills from (1-3), whereas in the second lecture, the instructor expanded and prepared her learners to extra exercises either from textbook or prepared material from extra material in addition to the discussion from skills (4-7).

Moreover, in the third lecture, the instructor felt the learners begin to understand their responsibilities towards TOEFL Learning besides skills from (8-11) were explained.

All in all, in the final lecture, the instructor gave the final two skills with posttest.

2.2.3 Test of Written English (TWE)

This section is designed to evaluate the learners' ability in writing an essay. The time required is 30 minutes to complete well organized essay and to cover all strategies and principles to complete this area.

This section is separated from other three sections even its score is calculated in a different way. TWE is out of (6) and the learners should get 4 out of 6 in order to enter the USA universities and some universities that require TOEFL Official certificate.

In the first lecture, the instructor gave some details about the mood of exam and general strategies of writing an essay, as well as skills from (1-2).

After that, the second lecture followed first one; the learners began to know what to do while writing when they learned skills (3-4). Lecture three is a continuation to lectures one and two, skills (5-6) were explained, whereas lecture four ended the TOEFL training course for TWE by discussing skills (7-8) and the learners were examined posttest. (Philips, 2003:323).

It is worth to mention that details about section two that structure and written expression were explained in **Lesson Plan (assessment techniques: formative and summative)** because this section represents the teaching material for the experiment.

2.3 Assessment Techniques: Formative and Summative

2.3.1 Overview

Formative and summative assessments are interactive, and they seldom stand alone in construction or effect. When doing assessment, attention needs to be paid not only to outcomes but also an equally to the experiences that lead to those out comes. Therefore, Summative and formative assessments should stay along side in teaching and learning process and each weigh half in the terminal grade of the learning subject (Wei, 2011:99).

Formative assessments are on-going assessment, reviews, and observations in a classroom. (William and Black, 1996:26)

One way of conceptualizing formative assessments are as “practice”. In formative techniques, the learners receive information about their level of understanding; such as, observations, questioning strategies, and self and peer assessment, and learner record keeping. (Garrison and Ehriughes, 2007:13).

Besides, practical examples of formative techniques include asking learners to submit one or two sentences in identifying the main points of the lecture. (Eberly Centre for Teaching Excellence, 2012)

Garrison and Ehriughes (2007:14) noticed that formative techniques are dependent on learners’ involvement. Learners must be involved as both assessors of their own learning as well as other learners’ learning. Instructors act as learners in the learning process via identifying learning goals, setting clear criteria for success, and designing assessment tasks.

Black and Wiliam(1998b:147) define assessment broadly to include all activities that instructors and learners undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. Assessment encompasses instructor observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of learner work, including homework and tests.

Boston (2002:20) shows that feedback is given as part of formative assessment helps learners become aware of any gaps that exit between their desired goal and their current knowledge, understanding, or skill and guides them through actions necessary to obtain the goal.

On the other hand, the most helpful type of feedback on tests and homework provides specific comments about errors and specific suggestions for improvement and encourages learners to focus their attention thoughtfully on the task rather than on simply getting the right answer. Such a type of feedback is appropriate for lower achieving learners because it puts an emphasis on how learners can improve as a result of effort rather than be doomed to low achievement due to some presumed lack of innate ability (Bangert-Drown and Morgan,1991:230).

On the other hand, feedback originates from an instructor, and learners can play an important role in formative assessment through self-evaluation.

While summative techniques are given to assess what learners do and do not know about a particular learning topic, they measure the level of success or proficiency that has been obtained at the end of an instructional unit, Such as, final exams, state assessment, and end-of-unit chapter tests. Summative techniques are vital to gauging learners understanding of learning process are less useful in providing information at the classroom level to make instructional adjustments and interventions.

In sum, formative techniques tell “where we are now, while summative techniques tell how well the course went”. (Pulvermacher, 2014:2)

3. Producers

3.1 Lesson Plan (Formative and Summative Techniques in TOEFL Training Course)

Since the goal of formative technique is to gain understanding of what learners know and do not know in order to make responsive changes in teaching and learning (Boston, 2002:3)

The present research is restricted to section two in TOEFL training course which is related to structure and written expressions. This section is designed to measure the learners' ability in recognizing rules of grammar, and it is represented by 60 skills problems in grammar which are found in "Longman Preparation TOEFL Course". The instructor (the researcher herself) depends on textbook, white board and laptop with data show as tools of equipment to present the material.

In the first lecture, the learners have taken Diagnostic pre-test, general strategies for the structure questions and skills from (1-8) to evaluate learners' level of performance and determine specific area of weakness, and the instructor explains the general strategies of structure and written expressions. Later on, the instructor starts to explain general rules of grammar and open classroom discussion to assess the learners' level and determine their needs from observation and type of question the learners ask.

Black and Wiliam(1998b:145) noticed that instructors use questioning and classroom discussion as an opportunity to increase their learners' knowledge and improve understanding. They suggest strategies to involve everyone in classroom such as:

- 1- Invite learners to discuss their thinking about a question or topic in pairs or small groups, and then ask a representative to share the thinking with the larger group (something called think-pair-share).

Therefore, in the present study, the instructor divides her learners into four small groups and asks questions about the structure of one clause and types of sentences; in addition, she permits them to share the ideas and one learner from each group answer and then, the instructor and the learners discuss the answer for each group, and the group who answer correctly receive Fullmark to encourage them and cooperate among other groups.

At end, learners write down the correct answer and began to answer the exercises which are found in textbook.

- 2- Have learners complete a few problem or questions at the end of instruction.

However, formative techniques have another tool to assess the learners' level during the lecture; for instance, tests and homework can be used formatively, if instructors analyze where learners are in their learning and provide specific, focused feedback regarding performance and ways to improve it (Black and Wiliam, 1998b: 147)

The instructor follows the above strategies to ensure that her learners have understood the problems with types of sentences and clauses by ganged learners' prior knowledge, assess progress mid-way through a unit and create friendly competition, and review before the test and make quizzes for ten minutes at the end of each lecture to assess their progress and provide positive feedback to encourage them, then the instructor asks them to do homework by answering all TOEFL exercises which are found at the end of each skill in structure and written expression.

It is worth to mention that formative techniques which are mentioned above are applied for all the lectures of structure and written expression section in TOEFL training course as a teaching method inside classroom.

Nevertheless, the task of summative techniques for external purposes remains quite different from the task of formative techniques to monitor and improve progress. While state tests provide a snapshot of students' performance on a given day under test conditions, formative assessment allows instructors to monitor and guide students' performance over time in multiple problem-solving situations (Boston, 2002:30)

Therefore, in summative technique, there are many tools to assess learners' level such as exams which include mid-term exams, final exams, and tests at the end of course units. The best tests should include several types of questions- short answer, multiple-choice, true- false, and short essay to allow learners to fully demonstrate what they know (Methods of assessment, 2014:3).

In the present study, the final test of section two in TOEFL test is determined by ETS Company. It is worth to mention that TOEFL test is a standard test prepared by native speakers' experts in English language to assess the examinees' proficiency in English language. Therefore, learners are examined posttest for structure and written expression in 25 minutes to answer all questions as procedures of TOEFL test. (Posttest is prepared by Development and continuous Education Center as procedures which applied at the end of training course. At the same time, the Centre of Development and Continuous Education has legal permission for formal TOEFL ITP TEST; therefore, the participants who participate in TOEFL training course have been examined the formal TOEFL test in the same center.)

3.2 The sample and Population of present Study

The population of present study is limited to the learners who learn TOEFL training course in the Centre of Development and Continuous Education during (2012-2013).

The total number of the sample is (27) learners who were randomly selected from TOEFL training courses in above center.

3.3 Description of the test

Structure and written Expressions section in TOEFL Test has two parts:

1. The first part is structure which composed of 15 multiple choice items, the items are incomplete sentences and under each sentence four multiple choices marked by A, B, C, or D and one of them is the best completes the sentence.
2. The second part is written expressions which composed of 25 items. Sentence has four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A),(B),(C) or (D) ,and ask the learners select the incorrect option (Philips, 2003: 92).See Appendix(1)

3.4 The pilot study and item Analysis:

The pilot test refers to a try-out of the test to small but representative group of testees (Heaton, 1975:158)

In order to discover the weaknesses of the test items, if any, and to determine the effectiveness of the test in terms of item difficulty and item discriminating power. The test was administered to a sample of (20) learners are chosen randomly as the subjects of the pilot study.

It is worth mentioning that determination of the time is excluded because it is determined by ETS Company and this test is global; therefore, the time required is 25 minutes to answer 40 items. The time is very limited because the aim of TOEFL test is speed plus knowledge.

After the application of formula of item difficulty, it was found out that it ranged between (0.22-0.75). In this respect, Bloom etal(1981:95) states that “ a good spread of results can be obtained if the average difficulty of the items is a round (50 to 60) percent and items vary in difficulty from (20 to 80) percent.

In addition to specifying the level of difficulty, it is often helpful to know how effectively an item separates students who know well from those who do not. (Bergman, 1981:112) It was found that the discrimination power ranges between (0.28-0.75) which is acceptable.

3.5 Test Validity

Lado (1961:30) indicates that validity in language tests depends on the linguistics content and on the technique or situation used to test this content.

To determine the test validity, the test is exposed to a jury of (5) experts in English language teaching and linguistics. The jury has agreed that the test and the procedures are suitable to be applied. The jury members consist of:

Table (1)The Jury Members

	Academic Rank	Names	University \College
1.	Prof.	Shatha Al- Sa'adi	University of Baghdad\ College of Education for Women
	Prof.	Najat Aljoubory	University of Baghdad\ College of Education for Women
3.	Instructor	Fatima Khuder	University of Baghdad\ College of Education for Women
4.	Instructor	Maysa Rasheid	University of Baghdad\ College of Education for Women
5.	Instructor	Nagham H. Ali	University of Baghdad\ College of Engineering

3.6 Test Reliability

A test is reliable “if it produces essentially the same results consistently on different occasions when the candidates of the test remain the same.” (Madsen, 1983:173)

To ensure the reliability of the test, the cronbach formula was used to measure the reliability and found out to be (0.85) which was considered a desirable correlation.

3.7 The experiment

The experiment is applied during the period from 16 of June to 25 of July 2013 for six weeks and followed by posttest. The researcher herself taught the group and applied formative- summative techniques in class. There were lectures on all days from Sunday to Thursday and the researcher taught section two which is related to structure and written expressions (Once or twice a week according to schedule which prepared by Development and Continuous Education Center and the researcher should teach ten lectures distributed among six weeks)

During six weeks, the researcher teaches two parts in grammar: the first one is structure which composed of (20 skills problems with clauses, types of sentences) and written expression which composed of (40 skills –problems related to relations among words inside sentences).

3.8 Test Administration

After a validity and reliability have been assured, the test was administrated at the end of the experiment to the sample of the study on the 25 July in 2013 as shown in appendix (1).

After the test papers and answer sheet were handed out, the instructor explained and clarified the procedures of TOEFL test and the responses were corrected by the researcher personally.

3.9 The Statistical Methods

The following statistical measures have been used to achieve the study aims:

1. T- test formula for two dependent samples is used to determine any significant differences between (pretest with posttest) and (pretest with TOEFL ITP).
2. Alpha Cronbach formula for reliability coefficient is used to measure the reliability of the test.

4 . Data Analysis

4.1 The Applications of pre-posttest and Pretest- TOEFL ITP test

First of all, the learners have tested to assess their ability in four skills and distributed in sections as shown below in Table (2):

Table (2) TOEFL Sections

TOEFL TEST TYPE	Section One and its Length	Section Two and its Length	Section Three and its Length	Section Four and its Length
TOEFL ITP	Listening Comprehension (35-40) minutes	Structure and Written Expression (25) minutes	Reading Comprehension (55) minutes	
TOEFL Official	Listening Comprehension (35-40) minutes	Structure and Written Expression (25) minutes	Reading Comprehension (55) minutes	Test of Written English (TWE) (30) minutes

The learners were trained to develop their skills in English to achieve the TOEFL test.

At the end of the course, the learners have been examined to assess their ability in TOEFL test and to compare their ability before and after TOEFL training course as shown in Tables (3) and (4):

Table (3)

Group	N	X	S	t- value		df	Level of significance
				calculated	Tabulated		
Pretest	27	38	11.7	calculated	Tabulated	26	0.05
posttest	27	39	12.67	6.583	2.056		

Table (4)

Group	N	X	S	t- value		df	Level of significance
				calculated	Tabulated		
Pretest	27	38	11.7	calculated	Tabulated	26	0.05
TOEFT ITP test	27	39	13.18	9.127	2.056		

Therefore, the learners who participate in TOEFL training course have been examined the formal TOEFL test in the same center. The results of this exam compared with the results of TOEFL training course (pretest-posttest).

4.2 Interpretation of Results

As regards the null hypothesis of this research which reads as follows" **It is hypothesized that the TOEFL learners' scores will not increase after TOEFL course training**". T-Test formula for two dependent samples has been adopted to determine any significant differences between (pretest with posttest) and (pretest with TOEFL ITP test) as shown in Tables (3) and (4).

The results shows that the mean score of the pretest is (38) and that of posttest is (39) ;the calculated T-value between (pretest and posttest)with 26 df at (0.05) level of significance is (6.583) which is greater than tabulated t-value (2.056) ;as well as, the results show that the calculated T-Value between (pretest and TOEFL ITP test) with 26 df at (0.05) level of significance is (9,127) which is bigger than tabulated t-value (2,056). Therefore, the null hypothesis that mentioned above is rejected.

4.3 Conclusions

- 1- The results show that learners' ability has developed after TOEFL training course and their proficiency in TOEFL test is improved.
- 2- It has been found that the results of learners in structure and written expression in the posttest and TOEFL ITP test are increased after six weeks training.
- 3- Formative techniques that are applied in TOEFL class are active and enable the learners to be the leader and centered classroom activities. They are more interested with formative techniques such as (classroom discussion, pair and small group, and self-assessment). Darling-Hammond (1996:536) indicates that “learners –centered refer to learning new beliefs and new visions of practice that are responsive to and respectful of the diverse needs of learners and teachers as learners. This means that all learning, including that support diverse learner needs and perspective, provide time for critical reflection, and opportunities for teachers to co-create practices with their learners that enhance learning, motivation and achievement”.
- 4- Formative techniques create learner-learner interaction during pair and small group and these techniques enable learners to improve production of language learning.
- 5- Summative techniques are applied at the end of the training course to determine what each learners have achieved and learnt. The results of posttest and TOEFL ITP test show that the learners' abilities are developed after the training course.
- 6- The influence of E-learning affects the learners' level by testing themselves in TOEFL TEST Samples from internet besides extra information about skills.

4.4 Recommendations and Suggestions for future study

1. Following newly techniques that facilitate the process of teaching and learning for both the learners and the instructors.
2. Finding suitable teaching method for each skill in English.
3. TOEFL test should be applied for all employees and instructors besides the students of MA and PH.D to identify their levels and develop their skills in English language.
4. Iraqi people should be trained more and more about English language because they learn how to speak, listen, read and write in English language as English language is a global language in world.
5. Making a comparison between standard tests like TOEFL and IELTS tests and find their effect on learning English language.

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