



## CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN TESTING READING

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### ABSTRACT

*The major aim of this article is to investigate the essential challenges and barriers in testing reading of English Language and to consider both sides as the importance of testing reading among English language learners and their prospects in learning the language.*

**Methods.** There are different types of tasks for testing listening skills as multiple choice, short answer, gap filling, information transfer, note taking, partial dictation, transcription and others. In my lessons, I frequently use short answers and gap filling in diagnosing the progress of my students. These techniques mostly work well with my students because the questions are short and easy to understand. Both of them can be completed and checked easily.

**Results.** These tests can be done in a short period of time that makes it possible to complete a bigger number of questions. The drawbacks of these tests are: students can guess the answer by analyzing the context or there can be possible answers that the students' answer could be correct though it is not the real answer of that question. So this can cause

misunderstanding in evaluation. However, any kind of test is a great help for teachers and students to accomplish their goal in learning.

**Conclusion.** Testing reading ability tends to be easier if we compare it to testing other skills as speaking or writing. However, it will not be straightforward to construct a good reading test. Actually, test takers should consider what they expected from candidates and then they should make suggestions for setting appropriate test tasks

### Introduction.

There are different ways of assessing learners' knowledge and skills. They are held for different purposes whether for



measuring proficiency, diagnosing learners' strengths and weaknesses, placing learners into different levels of a course or for other reasons.

Arthur Hughes (2016) in chapter 11 "Testing Reading" claims that, testing reading ability often seems easy comparing to other testing as oral ability or writing skills. When people write and speak, they see and hear but when people read and listen, they mostly cannot observe anything. According to Arthur Hughes (2016), the main feature of a good reading test task is not only setting tasks where the candidate can exercise reading skills but it should lead the test taker to demonstrate those skills successfully. The author mentioned about the general framework for specifications, the skills that readers perform when reading a text as "operations". The first skill is Skimming. Here the candidate can guess the main idea and discourse topic quickly and efficiently, easily construct the structure of a text, decide the relevance of a text to their needs. Next skill is Search reading, it shows the ability of the candidate to find the information quickly on a definite topic. The last one is Scanning that demonstrates candidate's ability to find specific words or phrases, figures, percentages, specific items or specific names in a bibliography quickly.

Some linguists think that successful reading task are quite acceptable as they mentioned that the specifications should be kept in mind while creating a good reading

test. The length of the text and the topic should definitely match with the candidates' level and age. It should not be time consuming or too challenging.

If it comes to multiple choice or gap filling tests they are considered as wide spread type of tests that are preferable for both teachers and students. You can easily find authentic listening tests and use the recordings in your class but students should deal with some challenges as quick reading and predicting the right answer.

Experts give different ideas concerning what a good reading test should be like. They counted almost all characteristics that should be taken into account while creating reading tests. As Arthur Hughes (2016) recommended in his article "Testing for Language Teachers" *each of the questions that were referred to in the first paragraph must be testing something. If our items are going to test something in a test of overall ability, we should try to test a sample of all the skills that are involved in reading and are relevant to our purpose.*

Listening test techniques as linguists mentioned in their writing like Information transfer and Partial dictation are one of successful techniques in testing listening. However, in these kind of tests there might be spelling errors while completing the gap that can lead to scoring problems. Another drawback is that the gaps may be longer than one word that causes misunderstanding in choosing suitable word combination or phrase.



There is no doubt that most linguists are concerning about the authentic material for testing reading skills. It should be suitable and designed for a particular level of students. You should consider the audience, their background knowledge and the skill you are going to check. Arthur Hughes (2016) in his article "Testing for Language Teachers" counted some essential operations for careful reading as identifying pronominal reference and discourse markers, interpreting complex and topic sentences, outlining logical organization of a text and development of an argument etc. Distinguishing general statements from examples or distinguishing fact, from opinion are the skills that require test takers be more attentive and intent.

There are different methods of assessing students' knowledge and skills. According to some linguists, formative assessment is one of methods that teachers use to evaluate their students comprehension and academic progress during the lesson. The main purpose of formative assessment is to collect detailed information that can serve to improve teaching instruction and student learning. Formative assessment often leads to better results of summative assessment at the end of a specific instructional period, unit, course etc. The expert of assessment Paul Black says: "When the cook tastes the soup, that is formative assessment. When the customer testes the soup, that is summative assessment".

Assessment is considered as a systematic process of evaluating. We can differentiate two types of assessment: formative and



summative. Formative assessment occurs during the learning process. It is useful for both teachers and learners to know what they have mastered and what they need to improve. I usually do formative assessment in every lesson to see my students' progress and weaknesses and suggest them what they should learn further in their study. For example, I ask them to write one or two sentences identifying the main point of a topic or a grammar lesson, sometimes I

encourage students to write down in a brainstorm activity all they know about how to protect environment so that I can find out what students already know about environment I am going to teach. Mostly I give them oral and written feedback and praise them with such words as *Well done!*, *Good job!* or *Brilliant!* if their work needs improvement I give suggestions and examples for further study.



The role of the student assessment task is important because it provides useful feedback to both faculty and students about how well students are achieving their course's learning goals. The assessment allows students to determine their understanding of their skills in

relation to the learning goals of the course. This provides the evidence needed to document and verify that meaningful learning took place in the classroom. In addition, assessments deeply improve learning, including lifelong learning. It prepares students for their role in participating in a democratic society. Students feel that they have some control over their evaluation. Develop learner



autonomy, cognitive skills, metacognitive involvement, promote active involvement in learning, promote better understanding of content, and enhance task quality and attention. Assessment promotes personal or intellectual development or social skills. In general, rating assignments are one of the most important skills students need for future professional development and lifelong learning, as they support student learning and develop the ability to assess the learning process (Boud and Falchikov), 2006; Taras, 2010).

Challenges in assessing reading:

- The process of interacting with the text is dynamic and variable, and the same learner in the same text can be different at different times.
- It is difficult to read the strategies that candidates need to develop or use to take the test.
- Reading contains many complementary skills, but it is very difficult to evaluate skills in an integrated way.

Multiple choices. Candidates prove that their reading was successful by checking

one of several options. Short answer. The best short answer question is a clear correct question. It is important to make sure that the exact source is listed in the text. In some cases, you may need to make small changes to the text to meet this requirement. This technique also works well when testing your ability to predict the meaning of unknown words from context. Fill the gap. This technique is especially useful when testing reading. It can be used whenever the required answer is complex and can cause writing (and scoring) problems. Filling blanks is also the basis of what is known as "filling blanks". With this technique, the readings are summarized by the tester, leaving a gap in the summary for candidates to fill out. This is actually an extension of gap filling technology and shares its quality. It allows the setting of some reliable but related elements in a relatively short passage. Information transfer. One way to minimize a candidate's writing ability requirements is to successfully complete a reading task by providing simple information to a table, following a route on a map, or annotating an image.

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