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MULTIPLE-CHOICE AND SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS IN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ITEM FORMAT AND SECOND LANGUAGE READING

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Annotation: This article mentions the significance of language assessment and the usage of various kinds of questions in the process of language evaluation. In particular, multiple-choice questions and short answer questions are given as a vivid sample of language assessment means in terms of reading skill evaluation. In addition to this, the article emphasizes the interplay between item format and second language reading process.

Key words: Multiple- choice, short answer, assessment, test, learning process, test format, methods, scanning, skimming.

Learning assessments are usually divided into large-scale and classroom assessments, depending on the goals of the test user. While large-scale assessments are used to measure the performance of examinees at the district, state, or national level, classroom assessment focuses on the performance of individual examinees in the classroom. Because large-scale assessments are designed for different test populations, they must generate consistent test scores for different populations in order to compare and measure trends. In contrast, classroom assessment is designed to measure local learning goals and guide decisions about teaching and learning.

When assessing in the classroom, some teachers may prefer MCQ to SAQ, especially in a class with a large number of students, which is common in English courses in some regions of the world, such as Asia.

There are three main reasons why educators may choose MCQ SAQ for large classes. First, MCQ items are easy to evaluate because scoring machines can evaluate them efficiently and inexpensively. However, the SAQ evaluation process can be time consuming and costly as the evaluation requires skilled human work. Second, each MCQ comes with prescribed options, so instructors or graders only need an answer key to rate them. Thus, inter-rater reliability is not an issue for MCQ tests. On the other hand, SAQs require subjects to state their opinion in words or sentences, so it is not easy for raters to reach a high degree of consensus (reliability between raters).

Thirdly, test subjects can usually complete a significant number of MCQs in a short period of time, which allows a wide range of test content (content representativeness/content validity) to be fully covered. Since the test takers take time to compose their responses to the SAQ questions, this type of test format offers fewer responses from the test takers and it is therefore difficult for the SAQ to cover the same range of test content (content underrepresentation) as the MCQ. Although test-taking strategies can be used in language tests of different formats, they are of primary importance to multiple-choice questions. Multiple-choice questions are often problematic due to their emphasis on testing salience, isolation of critical information, ignorance of less relevant details, and analysis of language. In addition, multiple-choice tests are extensively used in second/foreign language programs to assess different aspects of language leaning due to high reliability, convenience in scoring, efficiency, and economy. Several studies have also shown that test-taking strategies are most susceptible to multiple-choice items.[1]

However, SAQ items hold a number of advantages over MCQs. Language testing researchers have argued that MCQ test-takers mainly rely on selective deletion (i.e., eliminating prescribed options via text clues) and micro-level reading strategies (e.g., deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words, extracting information by searching the text), so it is very difficult to

[1] Katalin, B. (2000). Reflections on the test-taking strategies of 7th and 11th grade Hungarian students of English. ELT Journal, 7.

generalize MCQ test scores for overall proficiency. In the case of reading assessment, some researchers have indicated that SAQs enable test-takers to use a variety of reading strategies, such as distinguishing literal and implied meanings, inferring information that is not explicitly stated, and obtaining the main idea by connecting clues from different sentences. These studies suggest that SAQs may be more effective at assessing test-takers' reading proficiency.

In addition, the possibility of random guessing can affect the reliability and validity of MCQ tests. Because the correct answer is embedded in a set of prescribed options, it is possible that subjects may randomly guess when they have trouble finding the correct answer. On the contrary, since they require test takers to use the target language to construct their responses, the SAQ format should minimize the test-taking strategy based on random guessing, as they require test takers to use the target language to construct their responses, which creates a high degree of confidence. Given their potential as authentic assessments and revealing reading strategies, SAQs are sometimes preferred by school teachers.

Multiple choice questions (MCQ) and short answer questions (SAQ) are the most common test formats for assessing the level of English proficiency. While the former provides test-takers with written options, the latter requires short written answers. Test developers favor MCQ over SAQ for the following reasons: less time required for scoring, high consistency of scoring, and wide content coverage.[2]

This mixed methods dissertation explores the impact of test format on reading performance, metacognitive awareness, test completion processes, and task perception. Currently, the most common test formats used to assess reading in English. Qualifications are multiple choice questions (MCQ) and short answer questions (SAQ). Unlike speaking and writing, which are productive skills, reading is considered a receptive skill; thus, the field has not accepted extended communicative performance tasks for reading assessment.

In the MCQ format, test developers provide test takers with comprehension questions that include prescribed options or distractions. Test takers choose the best answer from these options or distractions based on their understanding of the source text. Instead of offering prescribed options or distractions, the SAQ format requires subjects to answer reading questions in two to three sentences, depending on their reading comprehension.

For large classes, there are three main reasons why teachers might choose MCQ over SAQ. First, multiple-choice questions are easy to score because scoring computers can score them quickly and cheaply. However, since the evaluation involves skilled human labor, the evaluation of short answer questions can be time consuming and costly. Second, because each MCQ has predefined answers, instructors and graders simply need an answer key to grade them. For multiple-choice tests, inter-rater reliability is not an issue. Short answer questions, on the other hand, require subjects to express their ideas in words or phrases, making it difficult for raters to achieve a high level of agreement (reliability between raters). relying on selective deletion (or, in other words, elimination of prescribed options with text prompts) and micro-level reading strategies, it is difficult to generalize the results of multiple-choice tests for general language proficiency. In addition, the possibility of random guessing can affect the reliability and validity of MCQ tests. Because the correct answer is hidden in a set of predetermined possibilities, it is possible that subjects may guess at random when they are at a dead end. On the other hand, the style of the SA questions should reduce the random guessing technique in taking the test, as they force the test takers to use the target language to build their answers, thus providing a high degree of validity.

The short-answer questions allow subjects to apply a range of reading techniques, including distinguishing between literal and intended meaning, inferring vaguely worded information, and deriving a core concept by associating hints from multiple phrases, the

[2] Mayer, R. E. (1992). Cognition and instruction: Their historic meeting within educational psychology

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researchers said.[3] The basis for understanding how readers interact with texts are five general reading processes and two general approaches to reading. Scanning, reviewing, reading to learn, reading to integrate, and reading to evaluate, critique, and use are the five main reading objectives that explain how readers interact with texts. Scanning and skimming are widely used by readers to find specific information or quickly understand the gist of a text.

The benefits that multiple choice items provide can be listed as follows:

- scoring and easy analysis of these results,
- preventing students from losing points due to language deficiencies such as grammar, spelling or punctuation errors,
- without evaluator bias,
- the ability to construct a test with empirical evidence (element analysis, etc.),
- the ability to collect data from large scales in an efficient and simple manner.

Despite the positive effect of implementing appropriate test-taking strategies on the testing process. Whereas these strategies are often ignored in many EFL/ESL curricula. This may be due to some causes. Most teachers may not have realized the effectiveness of teaching these strategies, or they are so busy teaching English that they don't spend time teaching strategies. This results in too many students knowing English well but not being able to do it satisfactory on language tests.[4]

However, it also has disadvantages, such as the need for a large sample size to design an MC test with a high degree of reliability, the ability to obtain the correct answer by excluding other alternatives, the difficulty of preparing a test in the presence of a lack of a test bank, and the fact that MC test items written not in accordance with the principles of writing tests, hide the knowledge of students, and do not reveal them. As for the advantages and disadvantages of TF tasks, measuring learning success in a clear, simple and effective way can be considered the main advantage, and the disadvantages are the categoricalness of answers that require justification, but do not require verification, and the possibility of accidentally obtaining the correct answer.

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