SELF-EVALUATION IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

Online self-evaluation is a novel way for students to assess their achievements in language learning. This article focuses on students' perceptions of their online self-evaluation in learning English for Specific Purposes. The self-assessment data are compared with the results of formal testing. The conclusions are drawn on the merits of self-testing in preparation for formal tests.

Keywords: self-evaluation, formal testing, English for Specific Purposes

Introduction

The most common way to measure achievement and proficiency in language learning has been the test (Frank, 2012). Testing is a tool that can help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and evaluate the effectiveness of programs, i.e. how well students have learned what they were taught.

In a discussion of language assessment, Bachman (2007) reviewed testing practices over the past five decades and categorized them into seven approaches: skills and elements, direct testing/performance assessment, pragmatic language testing, communicative language testing, communicative language ability, task-based performance assessment, interactional language assessment.

Student perceptions of online tests were examined by J. Pino-Silva (2008). It was concluded that 1) the two most frequently reported advantages of the computerized test were the instantaneous report of the grade and the fast and convenient manner in which it was taken and administered; 2) the two most frequently reported disadvantages were the need to adapt to a different way of testing and the visual fatigue that may result from reading on screen. But overall, the data lead to the conclusion that students' perceptions of the computerized test were very positive.

A good example of progress in large-scale language self-assessments is recently reported DIALANG (Stoynoff, 2012). It is a self-directed assessment available for 14 languages including English that is accessed for free via the internet. Examinees are able to assess their reading, writing, listening, grammar, and vocabulary abilities in a foreign language, and they

receive feedback on their strengths and weaknesses as well as their language level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Respondents

The respondents in this study are 2 groups of the 1st year students (2 samples), who studied English for Psychology at Mykolas Romeris University in the autumn of 2012. The students are mother-tongue speakers of Lithuanian and entered the university after having studied general English at secondary schools. The design of the ESP course reflects the students' needs in professional language. The course is adjusted to the requirements for a Bachelor of Social Science degree. The level of students' proficiency is B2 or C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Research methodology

The findings have been obtained from two sources: 1) a survey completed by two samples of respondents, and 2) formal testing of students' knowledge. The number of respondents in each sample was 17, i.e. 34 participants. The questionnaire was designed in accordance with accepted standards of constructing surveys (Dornyei, 2003). It contained statements on students' perceptions of online self-evaluation. The relevant part of the survey consists of 8 statements, to which students responded on a 5-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 "very difficult" to 5 "very easy". The survey is reproduced in Appendix. Statements 1 to 5 refer to self-evaluation of ESP vocabulary in accordance to the used online course book "Understanding Psychology" by R. Feldman (2010). Statements 6, 7 and 8 refer to self-testing of online listening from the website Breaking News English. The students' responses were processed by a means of Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-18). Formal computerized testing of students' performance aimed at clarifying the point of how realistic students are of their own evaluations.

Results and discussion

This part of the article reports the findings of the survey and analyzes the key points that emerged. For the sake of clarity in visual displays of the data, the negative responses (very difficult and difficult) and positive responses (very easy and easy) have been added up. Naturally, the neutral responses have also been accounted for in the statistical treatment. First 5 statements of the administered survey refer to the ESP vocabulary, and the last 3 statements refer to the listening tasks.
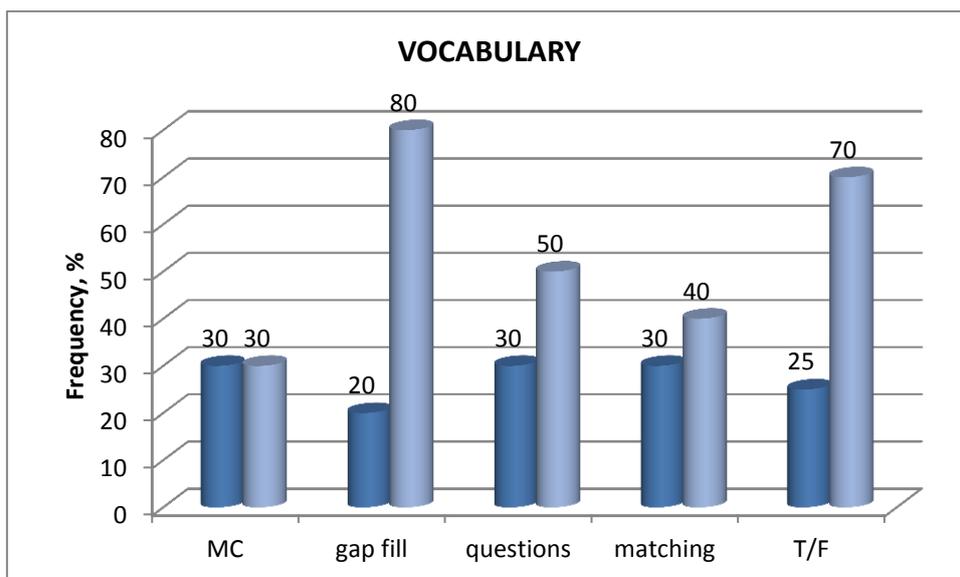
VOCABULARY

Chart 1 Sample 1: students' positive responses (1st cones) and negative responses (2nd cones) on difficulties in doing vocabulary tasks.

The frequencies of positive responses and negative responses on the difficulties of vocabulary exercises online are displayed in Chart 1. Positive responses (very easy & easy) are shown by the 1st cones, and negative responses (very difficult & difficult) are shown by the 2nd cones. It is seen that Gap Fill and True / False tasks present problems: 80% and 70% of students, respectively, find these exercises difficult. 30% of students can easily do Multiple Choice (MC) exercises, answer professional Questions and conduct the Matching of vocabulary terms and their definitions.

LISTENING

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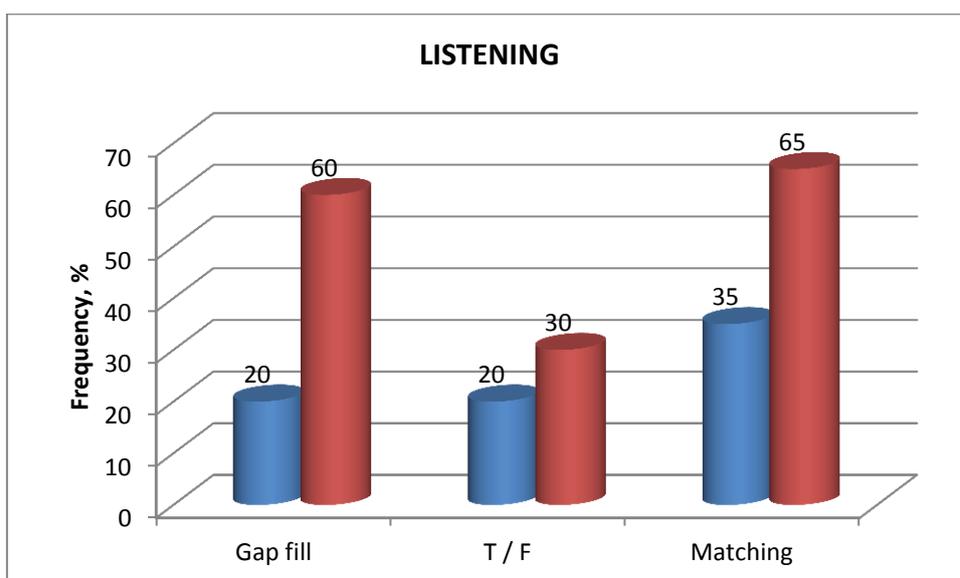*Galina Kavaliauskienė*

Chart 2 Sample 1: students' positive responses (1st cones) and negative responses (2nd cones) on difficulties in doing post-listening tasks.

Students' responses to online listening tasks are displayed in Chart 2. It may be seen that 20% of students find it easy to complete Gap Fill and True / False tasks after having listened to the online recording, and 35% of students manage to cope with Matching terms and definitions tasks, which is demonstrated by the 1st cones. However, Gap Fill is hard for 60% of learners, and Matching tasks are difficult to 65% of students, which is shown by the 2nd cones in Chart 2.

The second sample of students demonstrated similar responses, so they are not produced here. However, it has been of interest to process the data statistically in order to find out if the scatter of the responses between the investigated samples of respondents is significant in any way and if the results can be extended beyond the limited number of studied samples. Statistical processing was conducted by a means of the Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-18).

Traditionally, Pearson's or Spearman's Correlation coefficients *rho* and the Significance levels *Sig. p* (2-tailed) are computed to determine if there are any correlations between the samples. In this study, Pearson's correlations have been computed. Some data of computation are presented in Table below. As it is seen, 4 cases of good correlations have been detected either at the probability of 95% (*Sig. p* of .05) or 99% (*Sig. p* of .01). The values of correlation coefficients *rho* are either 1.000 or quite close to it, which indicates close relationships between the responses.

Table Pearson's correlation coefficients *rho* and Significance levels *Sig. p* between both samples.

Correlations are found for the statements	Pearson's correlation coefficients *rho*	Significance levels *Sig. p* (2-tailed)
1 Online MULTIPLE CHOICE vocabulary exercises are **easy**	.853*	.031
5 Online TRUE / FALSE exercises are **easy**	1.000**	.000
2 Online GAP FILL vocabulary exercises are **difficult**	.841*	.036
8 Online Listening SYNONYM MATCH exercises are **difficult**	.908*	.012

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level   ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level

Formal tests were administered to the same samples of respondents. Formal testing allows getting insights into the quality of students' learning. The grades that students gained in formal testing of ESP vocabulary vary within the range of 40% to 100%. It means that

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majority of students have passed their formal testing with the exception of a few, who received 43 or 44%, which means failure.

The grades that students gained in formal testing of listening are within the passing limits between 50% and 100%, which is the academic standard at the university level.

Conclusions

The following conclusions have been drawn. Students' perceptions of self-evaluation have demonstrated that online activities present certain difficulties depending on the type of the task. Some correlations between samples have been detected. It means that obtained findings may be extended beyond the limited number of respondents in this research. Formal testing of professional vocabulary and listening has been successful to majority of students, which suggests that self-evaluation is beneficial in preparation for formal examinations.

References

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Appendix.

1. Online MULTIPLE CHOICE vocabulary exercises are: 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

2. Online GAP FILL vocabulary exercises are: 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

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3. Online WRITTEN QUESTIONS are: 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

4. Online MATCHING terms and definitions exercises are: 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

5. Online TRUE / FALSE exercises are: 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

6. Online Listening: GAP FILL exercises are 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

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7. Online Listening: TRUE/FALSE exercises are 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

8. Online Listening: SYNONYM MATCH exercises are 1) very difficult, 2) difficult, 3) not sure, 4) easy, 5) very easy.

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