

The Role of Testing in the Certification of Language Teachers

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What constitutes a good language teacher? Research findings indicated that the four important competencies expected of a language teacher by educators, administrators, supervisors, teachers and student-teachers were :

- (1) *knowledge of language structure, lexis and phonology,*
- (2) *skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing,*
- (3) *understanding of aims and rationales of the language curriculum, and*
- (4) *ability to use suitable teaching techniques and strategies to convey knowledge to students.*

If so, who should be responsible for assuring that practising language teachers and teachers-to-be have the above competencies?

The Ministry of Education?

The Office of University Affairs?

Associations of Language Teachers?

Should these agencies be held accountable for maintaining professional standards of language teachers? If not maintaining the standards, should upgrading or raising professional standards be their responsibility? Then, who should *certify* language teacher? Should the same agencies be in charge of this function?

Teacher certification should be a continual process.

Certification, like evaluation, should be comprehensive, continuous, specific and individualized.

To be comprehensive,

a certification program assesses the three essential components :

(1) *The skills component* which includes command of the language, teaching techniques and handling of classroom activities, and the management of learning.

(2) *Information component* which includes knowledge of language teaching methodology, understanding about language syllabus, materials and teaching aids, and information about language communication systems, language variety, correctness VS. acceptance, language in contact, social judgements, language and logic, language and thought, and language and literature, etc.

(3) *Theory component* which includes principles, generalizations and abstractions about language as well as applied linguistics which mediates between theories and practices.

The assessment of these components can have different techniques. To assess the skills component, performance is the most effective technique. A team of raters serves as assessors of teachers' skills in language use and teaching-learning management. To assess the information component, on the other hand, the certifying team can use written tests in their objective and subjective forms. Through discussions and problem solving activities, the certifying team can assess the theory component of the program. A variety of testing techniques mentioned guarantees the well-roundedness of certification and the comprehensiveness of evaluation.

Certification should be continuous

At the entry into teachers' education, applicants are screened before being accepted into the program, and at the terminal point they are certified again before being accepted as teachers. This is the process of initial certification. The certification techniques consist of simulation, micro-teaching, and practice-teaching. Continual monitoring for quality control goes on into the teaching years. In-progress certification can be done using time-sampling method for observing teaching behaviors and testing language skills. Systematic analyses of student outcomes may be a useful certification device as student achievement. Permanent certification will be granted to only those whose performance has been continually proved to reach the standards of professional excellence. Otherwise, continual in-service certification goes on.

Certification should be specific

Specificity implies accuracy in the setting of teaching and language performance objectives to be assessed. Criteria for the attainment of each performance objective should be specific. Conditions for the performance of teaching and language skills should be specifically laid out. For example :

To demonstrate the skill in teaching writing, the teacher demonstrates to a certifying team the techniques for essay outlining and construction, and the skill in managing student writing activities while maintaining student interest in learning for a period of fifty minutes. The techniques and activities demonstrated must be satisfactorily rated by the certifying team. Seventy-five percent mastery is a minimum requirement.

Certification should be individualized.
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Language teachers under

certification should be regarded as individuals. Criteria set forth for a group of language teachers from the North may be unrealistic for language teachers from the North-east. A technique may be effectively used by one while proves a total failure by another. Individual teaching style should be considered. Flexibility in adjusting to different groups of students or even to each and every student is an important criterion. Like their students, teachers are not stick-figures. Each teacher, like each student, is an individual. General criteria may be applicable to only a certain degree. Individualized and flexible certification criteria are called for in certifying language teachers. Particularly in the domain of language teaching and learning in which communicative competence incorporating sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic dimensions is highly valued. A successful language teacher worthy of certification must demonstrate this competence via the assessment of their communicative performance.

To sum up, what is urgently needed is a national criteria and assessment program to:

- *assess the proficiency of both present and would-be language teachers,*
- *determine the language skill required to function in a variety of contexts,*
- *establish language proficiency achievement goals for the end of each year of study at all levels.*

The program should oversee developments of tests based on actual proficiency for assessing communicative competence of both student-teachers and teachers at all levels of education.

Is it time now for the national agencies mentioned at the outset to collaborate with professional organizations in creating such a national criteria and assessment program?

Bibliography

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