

## **Conventional vs. Modern Trends in Testing**

**Md. Rizwan, M.Phil., Ph.D., NET, PGDDE**

=====

### **Abstract**

This paper makes an attempt to find out the conventional and modern trends prevailing in our assessment procedures of educational system. The text focuses on two aspects, viz., conventional and modern testing trends and their description. It suggests a balanced use of conventional as well as modern method of testing as per the requirement of the job.

### **Key Words**

Written End Session Examination, Course work, Implicit Criteria, Explicit Criteria, Product assessment, Process assessment, Objectives-based assessment, Outcome-based assessment, Content-based assessment, Competency-based assessment, External assessment, Internal assessment, Authentic assessment, Self-assessment, Portfolio assessment, Journal writing.

### **Introduction**

The modern trends of testing are used as a means for educational / examination reform due to the increasing awareness of the influence of testing on curriculum and instruction. The conventional testing often focuses on learner's ability to memorize and recall, which are of lower level of cognitive skills. These tools require learners to display their knowledge in a predetermined way. The conventional tests are very often norm-referenced and single occasion tests and measure what learners can do at a particular time. However, test scores cannot tell about the progression of learners and difficulties the learners had during the test. On the other hand, the modern testing assesses higher order abilities and skills. The students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned. This type of testing tool focuses on the growth and the performance of the student. If a learner fails to perform a given task at a

particular time, he/she still has the opportunity to demonstrate his/her ability at a different time and different situation. Since the modern tool has developed in context and overtime, the teacher has a chance to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the learner in a variety of areas, manners and situations.

## **Objectives**

- Identifying the usefulness of modern trends in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the learners.
- Creating awareness about the influence of testing on curriculum and instruction.

## **Testing**

A test is an instrument or systematic procedure for measuring a sample of behaviour. It indicates the character or attributes that are of interest to the learner. In general, testing is finding out how well something works. In terms of human beings, testing tells what level of knowledge or skill has been acquired. In education, the test is used as a source of information for making decisions within the context of any educational programme. It also makes possible to improve teaching and learning through appropriate changes in men, materials and procedures. Hence, test and examination are tools or devices designed to measure a person's ability or knowledge or skills in a given area within a period of time, on which ultimately value judgment is done (Pon Subbiah, 2008).

## **Terms Used for Testing**

The terms 'test', 'assessment', 'measurement' and 'evaluation' look similar but are different terms and they may be involved in a single process. If we ask learners to answer a series of questions concerning any subject, obtain their scores by counting the number of correct answers, and conclude that the learners progress is in a desirable direction, we are concerned with all these concepts (Gronlund, Norman E., et.al.1990:5). The 'test' is the set of questions, 'assessment' is concerned with the qualitative description and 'measurement' with the quantitative description for assigning of numerals to the test results according to a specific system/procedures (counting correct answers), and 'evaluation' adds the value judgment (concerned with desirable behaviour) based on empirical evidence (Noll, Victor H, 1965:7-15).

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:11 November 2014

## **Difference in Conventional and Modern Testing**

The modern trends of testing differ from conventional forms of appraisal in several ways. It attempts to measure a comprehensive range of objectives of the modern school curriculum rather than subject matter achievement. It uses a variety of techniques of appraisal, such as achievement, aptitude, personality, and character tests. Thus, there are several types of tests that a student, teacher, or institute might encounter in an educational setting today. We can observe that the modern testing always includes integrating and interpreting various indices of behaviour into an inclusive portrait of an individual or an educational situation (David George,2005:1).

### **Traditional vs. Recent**

Traditional assessments are tests given to the students by the teachers to measure how much the students have learned. Traditional testing presents the type of assessments that people most often think of when they hear the word ‘test’ or ‘exam’. The common forms of traditional testing are multiple choice, fill-ins, matching, essays, and sentence completions, etc. (Semire Dikli, July 2003:13). Traditional methods of testing usually produce a written document, such as quiz, exam, or paper. Standardized tests, most state achievement test, and high school and graduation examination are also examples of traditional assessment. This type of assessment is not the only way nor it is the easy way to evaluate students, but is the most common way because it provides valuable information about the students’ learning.

Now the assessment of students has been receiving much attention of teachers, parents, researchers and educational institutions. This attention has highlighted assessment as integral to the teaching and learning process. The recent testing practices need to reflect changes based on new understandings of learning theories, new curricula that are being developed, new knowledge and skills that are necessary for this century and the accountability requirements of systems and governments. In this respect testing of student achievement is changing as today’s students face a world that demands new knowledge, skills and behaviours that are still developing further. Students, in this fast and ever-changing context, need not only develop deep understanding of the disciplines but also develop the ability to analyse, synthesise and make inferences as well as think critically and solve problems. Assisting students to develop this type of knowledge, skills

and behaviours and become life-long learners requires changes in the testing processes at all the levels of education.

Below are the examples of some conventional versus modern tests with their explanations.

### **Written End Session Examination vs. Coursework**

The written end session examination is a kind of test given to students at the end of a course of study or training or programme to establish students' understanding of the individual course or subject matter. It determines that the student is able to continue with the programme and to take courses for which that knowledge may be a prerequisite. For the programme as a whole, the written end session examination establishes that whether a student understands the body of knowledge required or not. Most schools, colleges, and universities conduct written end session examination at the end of a particular academic term, typically a quarter or semester, or more traditionally at the end of a complete degree course.

Coursework is performed by students or trainees for the purpose of learning. Coursework may be specified and assigned by teachers, or by learning guides in self-taught courses. Coursework can encompass a wide range of activities, including practice, experimentation, research, and writing such as essays, book reports and dissertations. In case of students at universities, high schools and middle schools, coursework is often graded and the scores are combined with those of separately assessed exams to determine overall course scores. In contrast to written end session examination, students may be allotted several days or weeks to complete coursework, and are often allowed to use text books, notes, and the other reference materials for research.

In universities, students are usually required to perform coursework to broaden knowledge, enhance research skills, and demonstrate that they can discuss, reason and construct practical outcomes from learned theoretical knowledge. Sometimes coursework is performed by a group so that students can learn both- how to work in groups and how to learn from each other (Chhaya Shukla, 2004:26-29).

### **Implicit Criteria vs. Explicit Criteria (of Assessment)**

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:11 November 2014

Md. Rizwan, M.Phil., Ph.D., NET, PGDDE  
Conventional vs. Modern Trends in Testing

Implicit is defined as something that is expressed indirectly or in a manner that is not clear, whereas explicit can refer to something that is true and without doubt. The conventional assessment systems keep the criteria for assessment hidden (implicit) and are not revealed to the students. But in the modern trend criteria such as the points on which basis marks are going to be awarded and the skills and abilities which are intended to be tested are properly informed (explicit) to the examinees well in advance and sometimes they are also encouraged to add some more agreeable points to be treated as evidences while quantifying the answer scripts.

However, the implicit criteria are used subsequently to produce precise assessments and are used in the sense of being always independent of the goals to avoid or alter the expression of the attribute to be measured. The explicit criteria assess the quality of learners, because such criteria make possible consistent judgments, clearly arrived at (Marius Bazgam, et. al, 2013:95-99).

### **Product vs. Process Assessment**

Process assessment focuses on the steps or procedures underlying a particular ability or task, i.e., the cognitive steps in performance. Because it provides more detailed information, process assessment is most useful when a student is learning a new skill and for providing formative feedback to assist in improving performance, whereas, product assessment focuses on evaluating the result or outcome of a process. Product assessment is most appropriate for documenting proficiency or competency in a given skill, i.e., for summative purposes. In general, product assessments are easier to create than process assessments, requiring only a specification of the attributes of the final product.

In conventional assessment, stress is on the result of the teaching, but in modern trend the process of learning itself becomes the object of assessment to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the process rather than that of the student. Process is the means and product is the end. The emphasis on the means is to help the students to develop strategies of knowledge seeking rather than knowledge receiving. Product is the assessment of passive learning, whereas, process is the assessment of active learning (Anthony J Nitko, 1996:264).

### **Objectives-based vs. Outcome-based Assessment**

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:11 November 2014

Md. Rizwan, M.Phil., Ph.D., NET, PGDDE  
Conventional vs. Modern Trends in Testing

Objectives-based assessment refers to a set of assessment approaches that centres on the pre-determined objectives, whereas, outcome based assessment is concerned with the all-round effects of learning including the pre-determined objectives and other intended and unintended outcomes considering all of them as the indicators of the growth of the learner in all the directions whether desired or undesired.

Objectives-based assessments are intended results or consequences of instruction, curricula, programmes, activities, whereas, outcome-based assessments are achieved results or consequences of what was learned; i.e., evidence that learning took place. Objectives-based assessment are focused on specific types of performances that students are expected to demonstrate at the end of the instruction. Objectives are often written more in terms of teaching intentions and these typically indicate the subject content that the teacher intends to cover. On the other hand, outcomes-based assessments are more student-centred and these describe what it is that the learners have learnt. Therefore, it seems to be more comprehensive when compared to the conventional ones (Pon Subbiah, 2008:141).

### **Content-based vs. Competency-based Assessment**

The content refers to the knowledge of a body of information that teachers teach and that students are expected to learn in a given subject or content area, such as English language, arts, mathematics, science, or social studies. Content knowledge generally refers to the facts, concepts, theories, and principles that are taught and learned, rather than to related skills such as reading, writing, or researching that students also learn in academic courses.

Content-based assessment is mainly concerned with knowledge and understanding of subject matter and to some extent assessing the ability to apply rules into practice, whereas, competency-based assessment is an approach of establishing occupationally relevant standards of competence. The emphasis is on demonstrated competence in the attributes important to an occupation or profession, rather than measuring knowledge in isolation from skills, or measuring the time that has been spent in formal professional or academic education.

Competency-based assessment is all about providing a way of building the skills and knowledge people need to perform their current job. It is also the key element of the succession

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 14:11 November 2014

planning process because it provides a way of developing people for their future roles. It is a continuous process of building knowledge and skills. The key to competency-based assessment is that it is related to actual skills and knowledge that a person can demonstrate in the workplace or in other contexts. This is different to other approaches where there is no requirement to demonstrate knowledge and skills, where people just answer questions as a test of their knowledge and skills.

The problem with this type of testing is that it does not guarantee that a person will be able to do something - it just verifies that they know something. The process starts with persons assessing themselves against a set of competencies. They compile a list of evidence that shows they are competent. A workplace assessor reviews the evidence and verifies the person performing the skill (Gronlund, Norman E, et.al., 1990:455-57).

### **External vs. Internal Assessment**

The external assessments are designed, selected, and controlled by another person or group commercial publishers, district administrators, or state policymakers. Typical examples of external assessments include standardized and commercial tests. External assessments occur less frequently than internal assessments, but they usually have been given greater importance, more authority, and higher stakes to indicate the educational achievement of students.

In contrast, in modern testing, internal assessments are informal, frequent and tied to curriculum and daily instructional routines in the classroom. For example, assessments of children's daily oral language, listening, and question-answering during group reading may be made through teachers' observation. Other internal assessments may be more structured, such as spelling tests, weekly quizzes, journal writing, reports, and projects; but they are all under the control of the teacher and embedded in the curriculum. We refer to these assessments as internal because they are designed, selected, and used by teachers according to the needs of their children. Internal assessments are used to make decisions about instruction and to report progress to the administrators and the parents (Pon Subbiah, 2008:103&74).

Apart from the above mentioned trends there are some other testing trends also which are very much in use now a days such as: Authentic assessment, Self-assessment, Portfolio assessment, Journal writing, etc.

### **Authentic Assessment**

According to the Daniel Koretz, in the late 1980's many changes occurred in large scale testing programme, which fell under the rubric of authentic assessment (2008:59). Authentic assessment is the measurement of intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful, as compared to other standardized tests. It can be devised by the teacher on his or her own, or in collaboration with the students by engaging students' voice. It refers to an approach for assessment that has been designed to provide a realistic task, simulation, or problem related to that attribute or performance being measured.

Authentic assessments ask students to demonstrate understanding by performing a more complex task usually representative of more meaningful application. Authentic assessments often ask students to analyse, synthesise and apply what they have learned in a substantial manner, and students create new meanings in the process as well. On the other hand, these offer more direct evidence of application and construction of knowledge.

### **Self-assessment**

Self-assessment is an appraisal of one's own personal qualities or traits, as measured by himself /herself with the help of a behaviour checklist or the like. This may involve the student in helping to devise the criteria by which his/her work will be assessed, and also in evaluating what he or she has achieved (Michael Milanovic, 2002:177). Self-assessment requires students to reflect on their own work and judge how well they have performed in relation to the assessment criteria. The focus is not necessarily on having students generate their own grades, but rather providing opportunities for them to be able to identify what constitutes a good (or poor) piece of work. Some degree of student's involvement in the development and comprehension of assessment criteria is therefore an important component of self-assessment.



In the process of self-assessment a form of reflective exercises, such as logs or diaries, is given to the students to assess how well they have met the assessment criteria in more traditional tasks such as essays and presentations. Audits or essay feedback questionnaires that students complete on submitting a piece of coursework are particularly helpful as one can compare his/her perception of work with other students' views on how well they have performed. Self-assessment may be used in a stand-alone context, or in conjunction with peer assessment.

### **Portfolio Assessment**

The alternative aspect of assessing without test is the use of portfolio (K.V.V.L Narasimha Rao, 2013:98). Portfolio assessment (a kind of modern assessment) assesses the process that is based on the collection of student's work created in response to specific, known instructional objectives (such as written assignments, drafts, artworks, and presentations) that represent competencies, exemplary works or the student's developmental progress.

A student portfolio is a systematic collection of student's work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects. The collection should include evidence of student's reflection and self-evaluation, guidelines for selecting the portfolio contents, and criteria for judging the quality of the work. The goal is to help students assemble portfolios that illustrate their talents, represent their writing capabilities, and tell their stories of school achievement.

### **Journal Writing**

Journal writing is a testing method based on the ideas that students write to learn. Students use the journals to write about topics of personal interest, to note their observations, to imagine, to wonder and to connect new information with things they already know. In this process a teacher assesses the students how they are engaged in their own learning and how they clarify and reflect upon their own thinking. When students write journals, they can record such things as ideas and feelings, special words and expressions they have heard, interesting things that have happened to them or information about interesting people. Journal writing offers students opportunities to write without fear often associated with marking. Every journal entry is

individualized. Hence, the use of journal is also one of the aspects of assessing without test (K.V.V.L Narasimha Rao, 2013:102).

## Conclusion

This article dealt with conventional versus modern trends of testing. First, the concepts of conventional and modern were defined, and then their different types were discussed. Finally, the concept of usability/ utility has been touched upon. These concepts are indispensable parts of test construction. It was pointed out that there is no way to keep apart anyone of them. A balanced approach between conventional and modern assessment is always critical. While deciding what assessment strategy to use, teachers/ administrators need to consider the issues such as content, context, and audience.

## References

1. Gronlund, Norman E & Linn, Robert L; Measurement and Evaluation in Teaching (Sixth Edition); Macmillan Publishing Company; New York; 1990.
2. Noll, Victor H; Introduction to Educational Measurement; Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston; 1965.
3. George, David; Trends in measurement and Evaluation Techniques; Commonwealth; New Delhi; 2005.
4. Bazgam, Marius & Norel Mariana; “Explicit and Implicit Assessment of Intercultural Competence”; *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences-76*; *ELSEVIER*; 2013.(Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)).
5. Michael, Milanovic (Editor); Dictionary of Language Testing; *Studies in Language Testing-7*; Cambridge University Press; Cambridge; 2002.
6. Koretz, Daniel; Measuring up; Harvard University Press, Cambridge; 2008.
7. Rao, K.V.V.L Narasimha; Explorations in Educational Evaluation; Neelkamal Publications Pvt. Ltd. Educational Publishers; New Delhi; 2013.
8. Subbiah, Pon; An Introduction to Evaluation Terminology: *Evaluation & Testing- Reference Material Series*; Central Institute of Indian Languages; Mysore; 2008.
9. Ryan, Katherine & Cousins, J. Bradly; The SAGE International Handbook of Educational Evaluation; *SAGE Publications, Inc.*; California; 2009.

10. Shukla, Chhaya; Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education; Sumit Enterprises; New Delhi; 2004.
  11. Balakumar, M (Editor); Istelahat-e-Ta'een-e-Qadr ki Tauzihi Kitab; Central Institute of Indian Languages; Mysore; 2013.
  12. Nitko, Anthony J; Educational Assessment of Students; Merrill Prentice Hall; New Jersey; 1996.
  13. Dikli, Semire; "Assessment at a distance: Traditional vs. Alternative Assessments"; *The Turkish online Journal of Educational Technology*; Vol-2; Issues-3; July 2003.
- 



Dr. Md. Rizwan  
JRP (NTS-India)  
Centre for Testing and Evaluation  
Central Institute of Indian Languages  
Mysore – 570006  
Karnataka  
India  
[mdrizwan01@yahoo.com](mailto:mdrizwan01@yahoo.com)