

## Using Call Labs as Self-Assessment Centers

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### Summary

Terms such as ‘assess’, ‘evaluate’, and ‘test’ are frequently used in discussing the assessment process. The paper attempts to reflect the definitions of these terms within different contexts and to discuss the different types of assessment techniques. The main focus of the study is to give an account of the way the CALL Lab at the Language Center at Cukurova University is used as a self-assessment center.

### Definitions and Associations Used in Assessment

Although the terms ‘assessment’, ‘evaluation’, and ‘testing’ are sometimes used interchangeably, they serve for different types of estimations. Following are the definitions of these terms as they appear in *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 2002*:

**Evaluate:** To think carefully about something before making a judgment about its value, importance, or quality

*Ex: The performance of each employee is evaluated once a year.  
The study will evaluate the long-term effects of exposure to radiation. (p. 471)*

In Academic writing we need to evaluate data, ideas, and situations and give our opinion of them, as well as just describe them. As a result of our evaluation, we assign some quality to what we have evaluated. Here are some adjectives to indicate that the quality is:

- **Good:** valuable, desirable, favorable, good, positive, right
- **Useful or effective:** beneficial, effective, powerful, productive, satisfactory, useful
  
- **Not good:** adverse, bad, disappointing, discouraging, inferior, poor, undesirable, unfavorable, weak
- **Not useful or not effective:** defective, deficient, flawed, inadequate, ineffective, unproductive, unsatisfactory,

In expressing the results of their evaluation, writers do not use general terms. Instead, they prefer using

- I believe ...
- I consider ...
- It seems/probable that ...
- It can be seen that...
- This may be considered ...
- It has been proven that ... (p. 471)

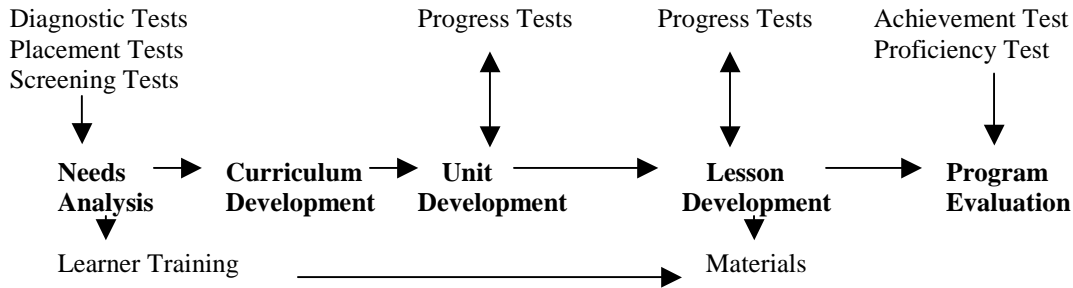
**Test:** This verb has five different meanings:

1. Check knowledge/ability
2. Check somebody’s body
3. Check machine and product
4. Check for quality etc.
5. Show if good/effective (p. 1482)

The meaning given in Number 1 is defined as follows: To find out how much someone knows, how well they can do something by giving them a set of questions to answer, or an activity to perform. This meaning can be associated with ‘evaluate’ and ‘assess’. Test results, however, are always based on some measurements, and for that reason they are given in quantitative rather than qualitative terms.

*Ex: The aim of the examination is to test your writing skills.  
You won’t be tested on anything you have not studied. (p. 1482)*

Turner (1995) illustrates the linear relationship among various types of tests, and their relationships to various phases of curriculum development (in Bailey 1998, p. 39).



Within the framework of language learning and testing, Bailey (1998, p. 4) provides us a diagram illustrating the relationship of the hierarchical components of language and the four skills:

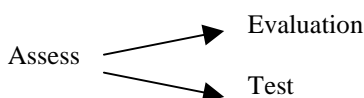
Hierarchical Components of Language	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Discourse				
Syntax				
Lexicon				
Morphology				
Phonology/Phonetics				

**Asses:** This verb has two meanings:

1. To carefully consider a situation, a person, or problem in order to make a judgment
2. To calculate what something costs

*Ex: We tried to assess her suitability for the job.  
Our agent will assess the value of your property. (p. 70)*

The first meaning of ‘assess’ requires the use of qualitative terms in expressing the result of the assessment; whereas, the second meaning requires more quantitative terms because the assessment is based on calculation. From these two different points of view, we may say that the first meaning of ‘assess’ can mean ‘evaluate’ and the second meaning ‘test’.



However, can we use ‘assess’ and evaluate’ interchangeably in the following sentences?

*Ex. We tried to assess her suitability for the job.  
The performance of each employee is evaluated once a year.*

If our answer is “No,” then we can say that in our consideration to make judgments, while assessing we concentrate on the qualities of the person, object or situation in order to see how well it would fulfill our expectations or to become aware of our strong and weak points and pursue our work accordingly to make further developments or accomplishments. The result of assessment is geared towards becoming aware of the existing situation. The knowledge obtained as a result of this awareness is analyzed and put into application in order to obtain better results. In the evaluation process, however, our concern may only be to make a judgment on somebody or something or the present situation to see the existing picture in order to make a record of it.

The fourth meaning of test (check the quality) may seem to correspond to ‘evaluate’ because in the evaluation process we are interested in the quality as well. However, although we say, “How do you test a melon/pineapple for ripeness?” we cannot say, “How do you evaluate a melon/pineapple for ripeness?”

Following are the definitions of some terms given in an article entitled *Assessment and Evaluation*:

- **Assessment:** Collecting information on the progress of students' learning using a variety of procedures (e.g., checklists, formal tests, inventories, self-assessment, language arts portfolios)
- **Evaluations:** Making judgments on the basis of the information collected
- **Grading:** Assigning a mark based on the information gathered from assessment instruments
- **Reporting:** Conveying the results to students, parents/caregivers, and administrators  
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/comm20/assess.html>

Within the given framework, the purposes of assessment and evaluation in ELT are cited as follows:

- to facilitate and measure growth and progress in English language arts
- to gauge students' growth, development, and progress against stated learning objectives
- to inform students and parents/caregivers about the objectives of the program and student progress toward meeting them
- to provide education administrators and others with information regarding the effectiveness of programs  
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/comm20/assess.html>

Regarding the process of assessment and evaluation, if we limit ourselves to three terms (assess, evaluate, and test), we see that we can:

- **Assess**            1. effects, needs, behavior, ability, situation, suitability, evidence, character, reaction, damage.  
                          2. value, cost, and income.
- **Evaluate**        performance, effects, data, ideas, situations, work, project, results, loans, process, success, and program.
- **Test**                knowledge, ability, skill, and person.

Bailey (1998) uses the term 'assess' in a broader context that would cover testing, but she indicates that in her book she concentrated on the "aspects of test development that are typically under a teacher's control (e.g. developing classroom or program-based tests rather than commercially developed standardized test.) (p. xi).

### **Basic Types of Assessment**

All these verbs have the noun forms (assessment, evaluation, and test) and these nouns are used in certain phrases. Following are some common phrases including 'assessment':

- Portfolio assessment
- Peer assessment (Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling 2000)
- Self-assessment (self assessment learning instruments: <http://www.progrowthassociates.com/Self.cfm>)
- Learner assessment (Hermes, 1999)
- Authentic assessment (Prestidge & Glaser, 2000)

**Portfolio assessment** is used in developing learners writing skills. It provides feedback for the teacher and awareness for the learners in the advancement of the performance they are involved in.

**Peer assessment** is an assessment type where the peers replace the teacher in the assessment process. Brown (1998, p. 67) suggests that peer assessments can be integrated into the language curriculum. Oskarsson's findings in 1984 (in Dickinson 1987, p. 150) also reveal that there is a fairly consistent parallelism between self-assessment and external criteria. In fact, in a project conducted by Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling (2000), each student's work for a biology course was assessed both by the teacher and his/her peers using the same criterion. "A comparison between tutor and peer mark for this criterion showed a significant number of students under-marked in comparison to the tutor" (p. 3).

**Self-assessment/learner assessment** is part of the learning process. It is partly a “process of learning how to learn” (Dickinson, 1987, p. 136). It is a process that requires students to judge their own language abilities /language performance. There are several advantages of self-assessments. They

- can be directly integrated into teaching and learning processes
- provide personalized assessments for each student
- are suitable for assessing learning processes while those processes are occurring
- require little extra time or resources
- involve students in the assessment process
- foster students’ reflection on their own learning processes
- encourage student autonomy
- possibly increase students’ motivation.

(Brown, 1998, p. 53)

The difference between assessment and self-assessment is that “assessment is used for certification” (Dickinson (1987) and for that reason it is a more formal process, and the results of the assessment are kept in records. Self-assessment, on the other hand, is very informal, and the process itself and the results obtained concern only the person assessing himself /herself. Therefore, if there is any scoring, it is very subjective since self-assessment is not for the purpose of measuring one’s knowledge but for giving awareness of what has been gained and what needs to be dealt with.

In both assessment types, there is a decision to be taken. In the assessment, the teachers or other authorities administering the test take the decisions in their teaching procedures according to the feedback they get from the test results.

Decisions about whether to go on to the next item, exercise or unit, decisions concerned with the allocation of time to various skills, decisions concerned with the need for remedial work, are all based on feedback from informal and formal assessment. These are key matters in any learning programme, and if we are to persuade learners to take responsibility for their own learning, then this must include responsibility for being involved in, and eventually making decisions such as these. ...In addition, the learners may be working at varying, and maybe, unpredictable times, and the learners may not be available for testing at times convenient to the tutor. Self-assessment used for appropriate testing purposes – to provide feedback information, diagnostic testing, and maybe placement testing – can release the tutor for tasks such as counseling, and for assessment tasks that cannot easily be conducted by the learner herself.

(Dickinson, 1987, p. 136-137)

Dickinson, while giving justification for self-assessment, illustrates the difference between evaluation and assessment in a very schematic way. Evaluation is related to education. Self-assessment, however, is a process leading to successful self-instruction (see Fig. 29).

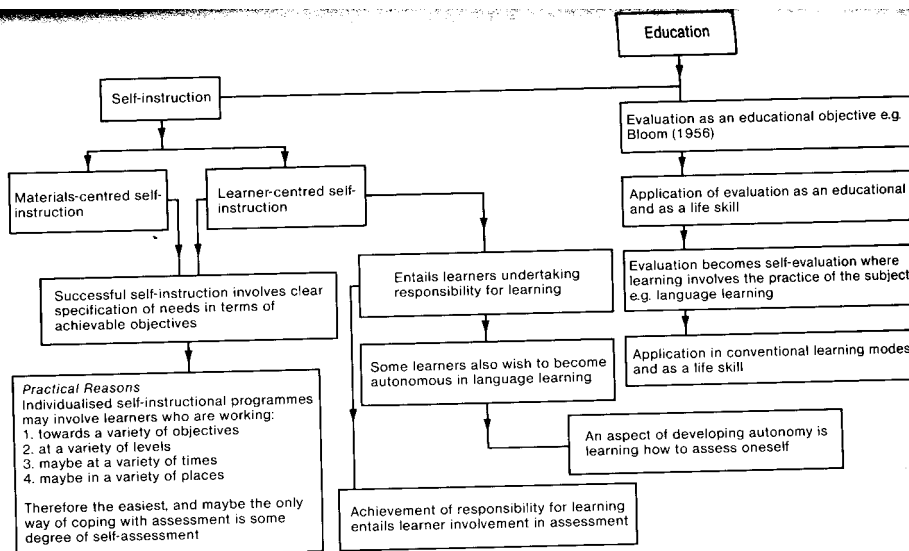


Figure 29 Justifications for self-assessment

(Dickinson, 1987, p. 150)

**Authentic Assessment:** As used by Prestidge and Galser (2000), it is the use of “authentic tasks and classroom projects as a means of assessing the whole spectrum of student accomplishment” as applied by Hiebert, Valencia & Afflerbach in 1994 (in Prestidge and Galser, 2000, p. 178).

Recently, educators have been working hard in designing “classroom environments that would promote the use of multimedia technology and student construction of knowledge through discussion, research, and group participation.” For that reason, Prestidge and Galser believe in the importance of developing appropriate means of assessing students’ understanding and achievement in a more authentic manner.

### Self-assessment in the CALL Lab at Cukurova University

In the light of the information given, the aim of this presentation aims to give a brief account of the self-assessment tasks students are engaged in at the Language Center (YADIM) at Cukurova University. One way we use the CALL Lab is very similar to the one explained by Prestidge and Galser regarding authentic assessment. Our students visit the CALL Lab once a week for an hour. During this time, they try to do exercises they find in the web sites they visit. The teacher guides the students as to which web site to visit by giving them a list of the related sites. Aside from doing exercises, they choose a topic of their own interest; and with the help of the web-quest activities, they try to get as much information as possible about the topic of their interest from the web sites they choose out of the list provided for them.

At end of each session, we ask our students to reflect their experiences and write the name of the sites they have liked or benefited most. The most frequently visited web sites by the students at the CALL Lab at YADIM seem to be the following:

- [www.english-zone.com](http://www.english-zone.com)
- [www.english.club.net](http://www.english.club.net)
- [www.better-english.com](http://www.better-english.com)
- [www.a4esl.org](http://www.a4esl.org)
- [www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com)
- [www.englishpage.com](http://www.englishpage.com)
- [www.easyenglish.com](http://www.easyenglish.com)

- [www.eslpartyland.com](http://www.eslpartyland.com)
- [www.esl-lab.com](http://www.esl-lab.com)
- [www.englishlearner.com](http://www.englishlearner.com)
- [www.rong.chang.com](http://www.rong.chang.com)
- [www.flo-joe.couk/fee/students/tests/tsindex/htm](http://www.flo-joe.couk/fee/students/tests/tsindex/htm)
- [www.bedavaingilizce.net](http://www.bedavaingilizce.net)
- [www.ingilizcesitesi.com](http://www.ingilizcesitesi.com)

We also use the CALL Lab to help our students assess their own learning strategies using either commercial or teacher-made materials that are based on interactive learning that focus on different skills. While working with these materials, students discover the best way they learn. Once they discover their own learning strategies, they get involved in working with the exercises that appeal to their own learning style.

The most beneficial side of the CALL Lab is that it provides different opportunities for students to perceive the information in different modes and channels. Even in 1990 de Jong and Stevenson emphasize the importance of self-assessment and claim that “if the teacher wishes to take advantage of the different learning strategies of the students, it is necessary to use a method which presents material via all three channels, audio, visual, and active.”

At YADIM CALL Lab students have access to the following CDs:

- *Tell me more*
- *Oxford Interactive Word Power*
- *FCE Grammar ROM*
- *Grammar ROM*
- *Longman Interactive English Dictionary*
- *English Plus*
- *English Works*
- *Grammar Dimensions*
- *Reward Elementary, Upper Intermediate)*
- *Learn English*
- *Step by Step*
- *Visual Dictionary*

Aside from these commercial materials, we use teacher made materials as well. These are generally geared to enriching one’s vocabulary. For instance, the book entitled *Vocabuilder: Pre-intermediate* (Ekmekeci, 2001) is converted into interactive material in a CD. The aim of the material is to help the students enrich their vocabulary by becoming aware of the suffixation process in guessing the meaning of unknown words and in creating new vocabulary. Students choose one of the 30 units in the CD. As soon as they click on one unit, they are introduced to a particular suffix or a prefix with an interactive introduction indicating the suffixation process with animation. Then they start working on the exercises geared to the use of that specific suffix or prefix.

We believe that the efficient utilization of CALL Labs will enable the students to work on a wider range of activities focusing on different learning strategies. Consequently, students find language learning more enjoyable and more beneficial. I fully agree with Williams (2000, p. 14) who concludes his paper mentioning the importance of using technology in education as follows:

There are many reasons why it is important for students to utilize a range of processes when developing their technological literacy and capability. Technology is such a broad area that a focus on any one process will not provide students with a broad concept of the nature of technology. All students have preferred learning styles, and utilizing a range of processes in teaching technology will appeal to more students than would the use of a single process.

<File:///F:/Computer search/JTEv11n2 Williams.htm>

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