

Using Student-made Quizzes in the EFL Classroom

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The pressure to do well on school entrance exams has probably contributed to the general negativity from students towards most forms of testing in Japan (Lee, 2008). Using student-made quizzes as a method of learning in the EFL classroom, instead of as a mere method of testing proficiency in the L2, may be one way to foster a fun learning environment and reduce anxiety towards test-taking.

Introduction

Quizzes are made up of multiple-choice questions, questions that require yes-no/true-false answers, or questions that require information. Since quiz questions are usually based on factual information, answers are either right or wrong. This form of testing is much simpler than testing students' oral abilities or students' skills in written composition, as these more complex forms of testing require subjective assessment by a teacher. Since the answers to quiz questions are quick and easy to mark, students may self or peer mark and receive immediate feedback. Allowing students to have control over the end process of the quiz, the marking or the evaluation, may reduce anxiety over having to wait for the teacher or a machine to total a score. Allowing students to also have control over the beginning process of a quiz, that is, its creation, would give students the opportunity to have more authority over their own learning.

Student-made Quizzes for Four Skills Practice

Having students create, administer and give feedback/mark/correct a quiz can give them the opportunity for four skills practice in the L2. As students create quiz questions and answers, they are practicing their writing skills. Students may then peer correct each other's questions, allowing them to practice critical reading skills. This simple writing and reading exercise will allow them to practice peer editing and develop their use and understanding of appropriate grammar structures and vocabulary items. When a quiz is administered orally, students have the opportunity to practice their speaking/presentation skills in front of the class. Students will have the opportunity to exercise items of speech, such as pronunciation, intonation, voice, speed, eye contact and gestures. When students listen to their peers' questions, they are being required to exercise their auditory skills carefully. During this entire process, the teacher may assess students' ability to write, read, speak and listen, as well as assess their ability to collaborate in pairs and groups. For many students, this comprehensive form of assessment may cause much less anxiety than a traditional teacher-made and administered quiz which may only test one or two language skills.

The actual scores that students get on quizzes that they make with their peers is not what is significant in this exercise. The main purpose of facilitating student-made quizzes is to allow students to use and to practice their abilities in the L2 and share information: "quizzes (are) merely a way of getting students to add to their repertoire of knowledge by forcing them to make new associations between the information gained and the knowledge which they already possessed" (Yoshida, 1985). Student made-quizzes are not meant to replace other forms of written or oral testing or replace traditional exams. However, the more students contribute to the development of lessons or to lesson materials, the more they are practicing student autonomy, reducing the traditional teacher domination in the classroom: "sharing of the traditional control that teachers have had over the content of the curriculum, materials, and tests, encourages students, as stakeholders, to take the initiative by making an input in these areas" (Kaufman, 1993). Giving students the opportunity to contribute their knowledge to lessons and act as peer instructors is a form of student empowerment.

Sample Quiz Questions

The teacher may preview the task of making quiz questions by first allowing students to take a simple sample written quiz (one that either the teacher has made or another group of students has made). The following sample quiz was used to review a unit from a commercial textbook for beginners that included learning the English vocabulary for various languages, nationalities, countries as well as cities:

1. What is the capital city of Canada?
 - a. Vancouver
 - b. Calgary
 - c. Ottawa
 - d. Toronto
2. What is the official language of Brazil?
3. The country with the second biggest population in the world is India. True or false?
4. Where is Jackie Chan from?
5. How many stars are on the American flag?
 - a. 48
 - b. 49
 - c. 50
 - d. 51

The content and vocabulary chosen for this quiz reviewed the textbook unit. Based on the above model questions, students could understand how to make similar questions based on their own knowledge as well as from information presented in the textbook unit. Some of the questions students created included:

1. What is the teacher's hometown and her nationality?
2. What is the smallest country in the world (size)?
3. The word tempura is from Portugal. True or false?
4. What three colors are in the Italian flag?
5. The World Cup 2010 will be in what country?
 - a. Australia
 - b. China
 - c. England
 - d. South Africa

In order to make student-made quizzes meaningful and not threatening, teachers should understand that student-made quizzes in the classroom are for formative evaluation, not summative evaluation, that is, the goal is to improve, not to prove (Smith, 1990).

Administration and Evaluation of Student-made Quizzes

The particular class was split into two teams with each student taking a turn to present his or her question to the opposing team. When a student answered the question correctly, his or her team got a point, but when the answer was wrong, the asking team got the point instead. This form of competition can be a fun challenge, unlike the threat of a traditional teacher-made quiz. Students are not graded on whether they actually get the answers right, but the teacher may want to make note of skills such as question formulation, presentation ability and pair/group collaboration skills.

The sample teacher-made quiz should be administered in written form so that students can easily see the varying forms of question structure. The student-made quiz, however, should be administered orally/aurally, as this will give them the opportunity to speak aloud and practice careful listening skills. After students have written their question(s), paying attention to vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and spelling, their questions (and answers) may be peer or teacher edited/checked for accuracy of language and

content. The quiz game may also be refereed or hosted by one of the students in the class, allowing students to feel total ownership or autonomy over the student-made quiz game.

Quizzes, like tests and exams, are usually regarded as a medium for a teacher to judge students' knowledge in a subject. Student-made quizzes, however, are less about knowing the correct answers to the questions as they are about making and understanding the questions. Although student-made quizzes can be used to review information that has been covered in class or from a textbook, giving students the opportunity to produce authentic language should be the primary outcome in an EFL classroom. When students are practicing how to make questions, they are practicing how to use the language creatively: "Since Socrates time, asking good questions has been regarded as a strong indicator of knowledge and intelligence" (Kerkman, Kellison, Pinon, Schmidt and Lewis, 1994). A good way for a teacher to evaluate student-made quizzes, then, is by evaluating the questions that they make, not whether they can answer them correctly or not. Students may feel relief when they realize that there is little pressure on actually getting the answers correct, and may then be able to concentrate more freely on improving their actual communicative ability in the classroom.

Conclusion

From following through with the creation, the administration and the evaluation of a quiz, students are familiarizing themselves with the pattern of basic testing through the teacher's point of view. Giving students the opportunity to write their own quizzes may inadvertently give them better test skills as they will better understand the process of test making by experiencing how to create one (Foos, 1989). Peer collaboration and evaluation may reduce learner anxiety, since anxiety that occurs in students that study in an L2 classroom is related to formal examinations, fear of evaluation and apprehension towards communication (Tittle, 1997). Teachers that can implement methods to reduce test anxiety and make the evaluation process a less threatening experience, will also be making their EFL classroom a more comfortable environment for learning.

American psychiatrist William Glasser claims that we learn "10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what is experienced personally, and 95% of what we teach to someone else." Facilitating student-made quizzes can allow students to be exposed to all of these forms of learning. Students will especially benefit from the experience of teaching others not only because it reinforces previously known and newly found knowledge, but also because it supports collaborative learning and is a form of empowerment learning. By facilitating student-made quizzes in the EFL classroom, a teacher is not only giving students knowledge, but also showing them how to use it.

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