Comparative Study of the English Language Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives on the Standard of Online Vocabulary and Grammar Tests

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Abstract— The study in hand aims at analyzing the perspectives of teachers and learners on the standard of online grammar and vocabulary tests and the differences between the perspective of teachers and learners on these tests. The study uses mixed method approach. 42 participants, 32 undergraduate students and 10 teachers, were selected for the study by using purposive and expert sampling techniques. The data was collected by using questionnaire and interview. The questionnaires were administered among the students and the interviews were taken from the teachers. The data was analyzed by using SPSS software and content analysis technique. The study found out that both the teachers and the learners think that the online grammar and vocabulary tests do not have the major characteristics of a good test and, thus, are not standardized tests that is why they should not be used by the language learners for learning language.

Keywords— *online grammar and vocabulary tests, perspectives, reliability, standardized tests, validity.*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sapir (1921) defines language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating desires, ideas and emotions by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Language is used by human beings to communicate what is in their mind. There are many languages on the earth used by many speakers for the said purpose. There is always a purpose behind language use. Some of the languages are more prominent than other languages. One of the most prominent and worldwide language is English language. English language is an international language and it is a lingua franca for many countries. Due to its internationally and globally acknowledged status, English language is being learnt by large number of learners around the globe. In the same way, lots of organizations, book writers and web developers are busy in writing or developing something that can help learners learn the language. Learners are using many sources to learn the language. One of the sources used by the learners for learning English is the online vocabulary and grammar tests. In order to learn any language, it is highly important for a learner to first learn the necessary vocabulary of that language. Vocabulary development is the first stage of language learning. Up to some extent, the grammar of a language is also important for learners to learn the language. There are many websites developed by web developers that test, assess and evaluate the language competence of the learners in terms of vocabulary and grammar. They try to teach vocabulary through lexical relations such as synonymy, hyponymy and antonyms etc. The grammar of a language is taught through fill in the blanks and true/false technique etc. Web developers and operators believe that these online grammar and vocabulary tests help learners learn a language. Different people have different views and opinions regarding the usefulness of these online grammar and vocabulary tests. The current study focuses on analyzing the perspectives of English language teachers and learners on the standard of online tests and the differences between their perspectives.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Learning any language is a very hard and tough job. Learners take years when they learn a language. Language learning in itself is difficult but it becomes more difficult and hard when you use methods that are not recognized and approved by experts as standardized methods. Nowadays language learners use online vocabulary and grammar tests for learning English language that are not considered as beneficial for language learners. The current study is selected to know the standard of the online vocabulary and grammar tests, the teachers' and students' perspectives on these online tests and the suggestions of experts regarding these methods. The study is selected to make students aware of the views of language teaching experts on these online tests. This will help learners adopt a standard methodology for language learning and will help them avoid non-standardized language learning methods.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Language learners use many techniques, methodologies and approaches to learn a language. One of the language learning methods used by learners is the online vocabulary and grammar tests. It is observed that the online tests are not up to the mark and are not standardized. The current study focuses on examining the perspectives of the teachers and learners on these online vocabulary and grammar tests in order to know if the online tests are of an appropriate standard or not.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are the following.

- To analyze the teachers' perspectives on online vocabulary and grammar tests.
- To know the learners' perspectives on online vocabulary and grammar tests.
- To point out the differences between the teachers' and students' perspectives on the standard of online tests.

1.4 Research Questions

- What are the perspectives of English language learners on online vocabulary and grammar tests?
- What are the perspectives of English language teachers on online vocabulary and grammar tests?
- What are the differences between the perspectives of teachers and students on online grammar and vocabulary tests?

1.5 Significance of the Research

The study is significant in the sense that it will help learners know the opinions, views and perspectives of the language teaching experts on the standard of the online tests. No study has been conducted till day on this area that is why an effort is being made to assess the standard of these online tests. This study will help learners adopt a standard language learning method and will help the future researchers explore more areas in online language tests.

1.6 Delimitation of the Research

Due to limited time and resources, the study is delimited to only two types of online tests, i.e. vocabulary tests and grammar tests. The study is also delimited to only one university, i.e. Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat.

2 Literature Review

For any person to learn a language, it is highly important to learn the vocabulary of that language. Vocabulary development is the first step for learning a language. You cannot learn a language until and unless you learn the vocabulary of that language. Vocabulary plays an important role in learning a language. Cameron (2001) points out that vocabulary plays a vital role in acquiring a language. In the same way, Linse (2005) notes that the vocabulary development of students is a major aspect of the development of their language. Nation (1994) says that vocabulary is not an end in itself. A rich vocabulary helps you improve the skills of speaking, listening, writing and reading. If you know large number of words of any language, you will be more confident in using that language. Your other language skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading will enhance with it. It becomes easy for a person to listen and comprehend a word that he/she has already listened and understood before. When you listen to a word for the first time, it becomes difficult to listen it. In the same way, if your vocabulary is rich, you would be in a better position to convey an idea in a best possible way.

According to Li (2013), vocabulary serves as the basic building blocks of a language. For vocabulary development, learners adopt different methodologies. Some uses videos, some uses games and some uses newspapers for this purpose. Some of the strategies and methods of vocabulary development are good and some are not. Ling (2008) have conducted his PHD thesis on the vocabulary development strategies. He identified 49 vocabulary development strategies that learners use. He says that the language teachers should teach learners how to use these strategies. All strategies are good enough but the real thing is the effective use of these strategies. If a learner uses the strategies the way they are designed to use, they can enhance their language skills with the help of them.

Different words are combined with one another in the form of a sentence by using different rules of grammar. Like vocabulary of a language, grammar is also important for the second language learners to master it. Azar (2007) notes that the role of language rules is to assist learners discover the nature of language. Language consists of predictable patterns that make what we read, hear, say, and write intelligible. Rules are made for the non-native speakers of a language. According to Dalil (2013), in writing and reading processes, grammar plays a vital role. One cannot express his/her thought until and unless he/she knows the rules of language because sentences that are not constructed according to rules of a specific language create ambiguity. In the same way, reading becomes easy if sentences are well constructed. If sentences are not constructed according to specified rules, they confuse the readers.

Language learners take help of online tests to improve different aspects of their language such as vocabulary and grammar etc. Larson and Horgen (n.d.) say that online assessments and tests can play an important role in language development. They say that online tests provide flexible learning environments and can also guide and motivate the students, due to immediate feedback. These language tests are of different qualities. Some are good for language learning and some are not. According to Horton (2000), the quality of an online test depends on design, distribution, grading and improvement. The last one is the most important aspect, Horton says. Buchanan (1999) focused on the distribution aspect of language tests. He says that the tries available for a particular student, flexibility and avoidance of cheat and technical problems are important aspects to keep in mind.

Learning a language becomes easy when you develop vocabulary and you learn the grammar of that very language. Researchers have conducted researches on vocabulary development, strategies for vocabulary development, grammar and strategies for mastering the grammar of a particular language. Researchers have also carried out studies regarding assessment of language but they just focused on the written or spoken language assessments that take place in school environment and no one have focused on the online language tests. In the same way, no one has ever conducted research regarding what learners and teachers say about these online tests. No one has conducted research on the attitudes and perspectives of language learners and teachers on these online vocabulary and grammar tests. The current study will fill this gap.

3 Research Methodology

The study in hand used mixed method approach that involves both qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher used survey method to find out the perspective of teachers and students on the online grammar and vocabulary tests. The population of the study was the students of the Department of English, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat. 32 students and 10 teachers were selected for the study. Only

those students were selected who used these online tests or they had ever experienced it because only they could give answer to the questions. 10 teachers were selected by using expert sampling technique from different universities. Only those teachers were selected who are considered as expert in language teaching and learning area. Questionnaire and interview were used as instruments for the collection of data. Questionnaire was administered among the students and the data was analyzed by using SPSS software. The teachers were interviewed and the data was analyzed by using content analysis technique. The results of the questionnaires and interviews were compared to each other in order to determine the differences in the perspectives of teachers and learners on the online vocabulary and grammar tests.

5 Data Analysis

5.1 Analysis of Students' Questionnaires

Table no. 1. shows the perspectives of the students on online vocabulary and grammar tests. The overall result shows that the students have negative attitudes towards the online grammar and vocabulary tests.

No	Statements	SA+A	N	D+SD
01	The online vocabulary and grammar tests are reliable.	0+2.5=2.5%	26.7%	46.7+24.1= 70.8%
02	The online vocabulary and grammar tests are valid.	6.7+0=6.7%	26.7%	20.0+46.7= 66.7%
03	The grading strategy of the online tests is good.	6.7+0=6.7%	13.3%	30.0+50.0= 80%
04	The questions in the online tests check the real knowledge of the learners.	13.3+13.3=26.6%	13.3%	26.7+33.3= 60%
05	The questions in the online vocabulary and grammar tests motivate memorization.	6.7+20=26.7%	6.7%	30+36.7=66.7%
06	The tests are appropriate to the levels of the learners.	6.7+13.3=20%	16.7%	30+33.3=63.3%
07	Online tests are standardized.	00+6.7=6.7%	30%	16.7+46.7= 63.4%
08	Norms of the online tests are available.	6.7+16.7=23.4%	26.7%	20+30=50%
09	The questions in the online tests are sometimes too easy and sometimes too difficult.	3.3+10=13.3%	10%	46.7+30=76.7%
10	The questions in the online tests are repeated mostly.	10+6.7=16.7%	6.7%	50+26.7=76.7%
11	The questions can be solved through inferential workout.	16.7+6.7=33.4%	26.7%	16.7+33.3=50 %
12	The online tests are objective.	16.7+3.3=20%	23.3%	26.7+30=56.7%
13	Objectives of the test do not align with the objectives of the learner.	16.7+13.3=30%	20%	13.3+36.7=50%
14	Error corrective feedback is not provided to the learners.	16.7+23.3=40%	13.3%	20+46.7=66.7%

One of the characteristics of a good test is that it is reliable. Crocker & Algina (2008) says that reliability is actually the intended consistency of test scores. By reliability we mean that the test will always provide almost the same results. But, unfortunately, the online grammar and vocabulary tests are not reliable. The analysis of the questionnaire shows that 46.7% students don't agree that the grammar and vocabulary tests that are taken online by different websites are reliable. 24.1% students are strongly disagreeing with the statement. None of the students agree or strongly agree with the stated statement. It shows that the students think that these online grammar and vocabulary tests are not reliable.

Validity means that the tests serve the purpose it is meant to serve. For example, if a test is developed to test the writing capability of the students, it should check the writing capability of the students, not any other capability of the students. If a test checks any other capability but not the writing capability, it is not a valid test. Aiken (1996) says that there are difficulties in establishing the validity of an assessment. 46.7% of the candidates are of the opinion that the grammar and vocabulary tests taken online are not valid. 20% of the candidates strongly disagree with the statement. Only 6.7% candidates think that the tests are valid. 26.7% students are neutral on this point. The grading strategy of the online tests is not good as well. 80% students think that the grading strategy of these tests is not good. These online tests don't check the real knowledge of the learners. Sometimes a student scores good marks but in another time the same students don't score even average marks. These tests are based on multiple choice questions (MCQs) and don't check the real knowledge of the learners. Competent students sometimes score less marks than the weak students. The analysis shows that 60% of the candidates

disagree with the statement that the online tests check the real knowledge of the learners. 26.6% students think that these tests check the real knowledge of the learners. 13.3% candidates are neutral in this regard.

Memorization is a very serious disease nowadays. The multiple choice questions (MCQs) are somehow responsible for this. Every student memorizes things to pass the examination and no one try to make his concept clear. The tests taken for jobs are based on MCQs. These tests lead the students to go for memorization, rather than concept. The online grammar and vocabulary tests also motivate the students to memorize things because these tests are also based on MCQs. 66.7% candidates thinks that these tests motivates memorization and 26.7% students don't agree with this point.

The appropriacy of a test is very important in assessment and evaluation. If a test is not according to the level of the students, the students may not score well and may get discouragement because of this. If students score extra marks, they may feel that they are extra and ultra intelligent and may start to quit hardworking. So, the tests should be appropriate to the level of the students. It is felt that the online tests are not appropriate to the level of the learners. If there is a test that is said to be developed for the grade 8th, that test is not really according to the level. It is either too easy or too difficult. 63.3% candidates said that these online tests are not according to the level for which they are developed. 20 percent students said that these tests are appropriate to the intended levels.

The standardized tests are the tests that are recognized by the experts as standardized. These standardized tests are used, observed and approved by the experts as standardized tests. The online vocabulary and grammar tests that are used by learners for language assessment are not acknowledged as standardized tests. So these tests should be avoided and the tests approved as standardized should be used by the learners. 63.4 percent students accept the point that these tests are not standardized while only 6.7% students don't accept it. The students usually say that the questions asked in the online tests are repeated. When you sit to take an online test, you will see that the same question is repeated many times. This is because these tests are automated and are not updated on daily or weekly basis. 76.7 percent students are of the view that the questions are repeated mostly. Only 16.7 % students replied that the questions are not repeated. The repeated questions don't help students in learning English. It leads to the wastage of time. Instead of answering the same question again and again, the students should skip it instantly.

As I said above that the questions in the online tests are based on MCQs and leads the students to memorize everything, these MCQs can be easily solved with the help of inferential workout. The students usually use this inferential workout technique to solve such MCQs. The students look at every option and think on it and discard these options one by one and at last they reach to the option that is closely related to the question. They actually don't know the answer and take help of inferential work and answer it. These tests can be passed with the help of inferential workout, so these are not helpful for the learners in learning language. The analysis of the questionnaires shows that 50 percent of the students are agreeing with the statement that the questions in these tests can be solved through inference. 33.4% candidates are in opposition to this view.

Every test is constructed for a specific objective and in the same way every students has a specific objective when he/she sits to take a test. The objectives of a test are very important. If the objectives of the test are different from the objectives of the learner, it will not help learner in learning language. If a test is constructed for the purpose of improving the reading comprehension of the students, it will not help learner whose objectives behind taking a test is to improve writing skill. 50 percent of the candidates are of the opinion that the objectives of these tests don't align with the objectives of the learners. 30 percent students think that these tests' objectives align with the learners' objectives. 20 percent candidates are not sure about this statement. So the difference in the percentage shows that these tests' objectives don't align with the learners' objectives and are not helpful in learning language.

Most of the learning takes place in error-corrective feedback. After a test, teachers provide students with error-corrective feedback on their errors. This error-corrective feedback is not just helpful for a single learner but for all learners because the feedback is usually provided in the classroom and all students listen to it. Students learn from one another's mistakes and errors. Experts say that error-corrective feedback is very important in learning process. Musserotte (n.d.) notes that every type of feedback on the part of the instructor motivates the language learners to improve. The online vocabulary and grammar tests don't provide error-corrective feedback to the students. 66.7 percent of the candidates strongly agree that these tests don't provide error-corrective feedback.

5.2 Analysis of Teacher's Interviews

The ten teachers were interviewed for this purpose and the analysis of the interviews shows that the language teachers and instructors are totally against these online tests. The teachers added that there are many helpful language learning methods, techniques and procedures. Instead of using a technique that is not beneficial and effective in language learning, the students and language learners should use a technique that is approved as a good and effective technique for language learning by the language experts. The teachers said that these tests are not valid because they don't serve the purpose they are meant and designed to serve. They added that these tests are not reliable as they are based on MCQs which can be easily solved through inference. The questions in these tests requires only one answer and if you don't know the exact answer, it means you that you will be given no mark in that question. Now it's up to the luck of the candidates that which type of question come in the test. Sometimes such questions come in the test the answers of which you know but sometimes the question come the answer of which is not known to you. On the other hand, in subjective tests, you can write at least something on any type of topic and you can get passing marks in the test. You can write things from your own self. The teachers said that they provide feedback to the students after checking their papers or tests. The students learn from the error corrective feedback and then they never ever forget it. They said that this is one of the major limitations of the

online tests. In summary, the teachers were of the opinion that these online grammar and vocabulary tests don't have the major characteristics and qualities of a good test and assessment, so they are not standardized tests.

6   Findings

Language learning takes place when the learners use effective and standardized language learning tools, approaches, methods, techniques and strategies. If the language learners use wrong and non-standardized techniques and approaches for language learning, they would be unable to learn language. The analysis of the questionnaires shows that the language learners and language instructors don't think that the online vocabulary and grammar tests are standardized. Some of the major characteristics of a good test are validity, reliability, usability, objectivity and appropriacy etc. Most of the students and teachers are of the opinion that these tests don't have any of the major characteristics of a good test. Their responses in the questionnaire clearly show that these tests are neither valid nor reliable. These tests don't always provide almost similar results and, hence, are not reliable. In the same way, these online grammar and vocabulary tests don't serve the purpose they are meant to serve and are not valid. The objectives of every type of test must align with the objectives of the test taker. If the objectives of a test do not align with the objectives of the learner, that test is useless. Most of the time and in most cases, the objectives of these online grammar and vocabulary tests are different from the objectives of the learners. These tests are developed for one purpose and learners use it for another purpose. These tests don't help learners if the purposes of these tests don't match with the purposes of the learners. The error-corrective feedback is something that can only be provided by an instructor in a better way. When the students make mistakes, the teachers correct their mistakes and provide explanation for it in the class and it is helpful for all the students in the class. Nowadays almost all the tests are MCQs type because it is highly difficult for the organization to organize subjective tests. If they organize subjective tests, it becomes highly difficult for them to check the papers. Moreover these subjective tests take large amount of time in checking. So neither the organization nor the candidates have enough time to wait for this lengthy process of subjective tests that is why the organizations go for taking MCQs type tests. These MCQs can be solved through inferential workout due to which we can't come to know about the real knowledge and competence of a candidate.

The major characteristics of a good test are not there in the online grammar and vocabulary tests. These tests are not reliable, valid, objective, usable, objective and appropriate to the levels of the learners. The absence of these characteristics in theses online grammar and vocabulary tests shows that these tests can't help learners in learning a language and hence these tests are not standardized tests. These tests cannot be relied upon in learning of a language. The standard of these tests is very low. The students and teachers have almost same perspective on these tests. No big difference was found in the perspectives of teachers and students on the standard of these online grammar and vocabulary tests.

7   Discussion and Conclusion

The online grammar and vocabulary tests are used by the English language learners in learning the language. These tests are not standardized tests and are not helpful in learning a language. These tests slow down the process of learning a language. The research shows that the major qualities of good language tests are not there in these tests. The previous researchers have talked about the characteristics of good tests. Cameron (2001) said that vocabulary play a very important role in learning a language. The importance of vocabulary can't be denied. The vocabulary needs to be developed. Linse (2005) said in this regard that the vocabulary development of the students is a major aspect of the language development of the students. There are many types of strategies students adopt for increasing their vocabulary such as newspaper reading etc. Some of the techniques of vocabulary development are really helpful but some of these are totally the wastage of time. Ling (2008) pointed out that the strategies are good but the real thing is how you use a specific strategy. If you don't know how to use a specific technique of vocabulary development, you will not be able take benefit from it and it would not be that effective and beneficial for you. Many people use newspaper for vocabulary development. Some of them are successful in developing their vocabulary because they use this technique in a way it should be used and some are wasting their time because they are not using the technique in a way it is designed and prescribed by the language inductors to use. Along with the vocabulary development it is necessary for a person to have command over the grammatical rules of the target language. If a person does not know the grammatical rules of the target language, he/she might not be able to express clearly what he/she wants to express. He/she might confuse the readers/listeners. Dalil (2013) noted that grammar plays a vital role in writing and reading processes. Both of the aspects of a language can be improved through different methods and techniques. The current research is concerned with the online test technique because many students use this technique to develop their vocabulary and learn grammar rules. Larson and Horgen (n.d.) found out that online assessments play an important role in language development. These online tests should be standardized. The current research found out that these online grammar and vocabulary tests are not standardized tests and students should avoid using them. Students should use only those techniques that are acknowledged by language teachers and language experts as standardized techniques.

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