The Challenges for ESP Learners: Alternative Assessment of Performance and Usefulness of Class Activities

Galina Kavaliauskienė, Ligija Kaminskienė and Lilija Anusienė

The most important knowledge teachers need to do good work is knowledge how students are experiencing learning and perceiving their teachers’ actions.

Steven Brookfield

Abstract. Alternative assessment has been widely used in education at tertiary level. The key features of alternative assessment are active participation of learners in evaluation of their own performance and the development of reflective thinking. Success of alternative assessment depends on performance that demonstrates what learners can do with language in communicative classrooms. Active participation of learners in evaluating themselves and one another is part of alternative assessment which is normally presented in the form of reflections on one’s performance. A recent Google search produced 89,100,000 hits for “alternative assessment” (January 2006). It demonstrates the importance and relevance of this issue in teaching and learning a foreign language. The research aimed at investigating the challenges of alternative assessment in linguistic development of learners in English for Specific Purposes. The study employed a students’ questionnaire on utility of various activities, and learners’ in-course and post-course written reflections on performance and linguistic development. Portfolios were used for alternative assessment of students’ work throughout the academic year. The portfolio items included written materials such as summaries, tests, definitions of vocabulary items, essays, Power Point Presentations, etc. Impact of various activities on learning has been analyzed. Signed and anonymous responses that have been obtained from three streams of respondents are being compared. The findings have been processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS). The results have demonstrated that alternative assessment is a helpful means for learner linguistic development. Learners’ likes or dislikes to various creative or routine activities are affected by success or failure in their performance. Students’ reflections on usefulness of various tasks and quality of their performance in different activities help teachers develop ways of dealing with difficulties and promote linguistic development.