Curriculum Design for Performance-based Instruction in English Language Education
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Abstract
Performance-based instruction is based on the principle that teaching and assessment decisions should be guided by the performance of each student rather than solely by completion of assignments and examination scores within a specified time frame. In language teaching, this principle requires students to demonstrate their proficiency in authentic ways that the teacher can both observe and evaluate. In performance-based instruction, the focus of teaching and learning changes from “knowing” to “applying,” and teaching, assessment, evaluation, and reporting are oriented around the demonstration of learning. Although class assignments and examinations are not disregarded, teachers develop assessment procedures around a clear set of content and conceptual outcomes and standards, and organize teaching practices by emphasizing what students are able to do with what they learn. Therefore, assignments and examination results are integrated with demonstrations of learning through portfolios in order to provide a holistic assessment and evaluation procedure. This paper first defines and describes the principles of performance-based instruction and assessment, then discusses the development of language curriculum that incorporates performance-based principles to language education.

Key words: Curriculum, Performance-based instruction, ELT, Education

What is Performance-based Instruction?
Performance-based instruction is a teaching approach that is concerned not only with what students know, but also with what they are able to do with what they have learned. The underlying basis of this approach is that a learner can develop competence in essential knowledge and skills if given sufficient time and support. This involves confidence that students learn most effectively when the teacher determines where students “are,” establishes where they “should be,” and then determines the best way to get them from ”here to there.” Performance-based instruction does not promote a particular teaching methodology or style; it accepts there are many ways to teach and learn and that the most important goal in teaching is that students succeed. Therefore, schools and teachers are responsible for devising instructional programs that help students attain desired learning outcomes. Performance-based instruction stresses that students should earn a diploma by demonstrating competence and proficiency in their learning rather than merely attaining high scores on examinations.

As with most instructional approaches, performance-based instruction begins with instructional objectives. However, performance-based instruction differentiates between learning outcomes and performance standards to clarify objectives in terms of “knowing” and “doing”. Learning outcomes broadly define what students are expected to know after instruction, while performance standards describe the level at which students demonstrate what they have learned. Performance standards also specify how much a student is expected to learn and do. These outcomes and standards are clearly defined and given to students before a lesson or unit so that they know what they are expected to learn and do.

Performance-based instruction promotes higher expectations and greater learning opportunities for students. Because performance-based instruction is concerned with students demonstrating what they have learned, the teacher’s focus is on realistic and authentic learning instead of examination scores. When students are given opportunities for authentic use of
language, they perform at higher levels of competency. Moving to the next unit in a sequence is determined by student performance rather than a time schedule or the number of assignments the student has completed. Therefore, time on task must be varied according to learner needs and the complexity of the task. In addition, to achieve language proficiency, students must be given the opportunity to interact with others and build personal learning skills to develop communicative competence in language. Finally, rather than using time in class, completed units of study, and final examinations as the sole criteria to evaluate success, performance-based instruction uses assessment methods in which students must show that they understand the content and concepts and can demonstrate their ability to use language independently.

Performance-based instruction simply means being unambiguous about what a student is expected to do after teaching. This means that decisions about curriculum and teaching are focused not only on what teachers want students to know, but also on what teachers want students to do at the end of their learning experience. Therefore, performance-based instruction is a process that creates instructional strategies that may sometimes redefine traditional approaches to language teaching and learning.

Performance-based instruction requires teachers and administrators to consider both the purpose of education and what is worth knowing. For example, why do children study English for ten or more years? What should Taiwanese, Malaysian, Thai, or Singapore children know about English after five, seven, or ten years of instruction? How competent should they be?

Performance-based instruction would help address some of the serious issues about English language education confronting schools in East Asia. For example, are the current goals and objectives for English language sufficiently rigorous? Are they appropriate for the expectations of students' adult lives? Do students demonstrate only basic levels of skill and knowledge of English and lack higher-order skills needed to use language independently? Can students complete their schooling without reaching a reasonable level of language proficiency simply because they have completed a requisite number of lessons and passed examinations?

With performance-based instruction, students are required to demonstrate their proficiency at a desired level. Just as a person getting a driver’s license is required to demonstrate the ability to operate an automobile, and not merely pass test on the rules of the road, language students must display their communicative competence and proficiency.

This brings up an important point in using performance-based instruction. Student progress may be compromised if the expected learning outcomes and performance standards are too low or imprecise. Moreover, some students may be tracked into low-level courses wherein they are not held fully accountable for the outcomes necessary for success. On the other hand, some students may be held to higher standards than others. In performance-based instruction, schools and teachers are responsible for providing all students with opportunities for success and achievement.

In summary, the principle underlying performance-based instruction is that all students are capable of learning and achieving high levels of achievement when expectations and standards are stated clearly. When this is done, students understand both what they must know and do,
and therefore feel that they are active participants in learning. Thus, an essential objective of performance-based instruction is for students, teachers, and administrators jointly to accept responsibility for successful learning.

**Integrating Performance-based Instruction into the Curriculum**

One challenge for performance-based instruction is to explain how teachers can successfully implement the approach in the classroom. Education ministries and school principals are naturally reluctant to reorganize the curriculum and revise assessment and reporting schemes to reflect a new approach that may be just a passing fancy. Therefore, before a teacher can use performance-based instruction, certain issues must be resolved. The first is deciding what learning outcomes should form the basis of a performance-based instruction approach, and no aspect of performance-based instruction is quite so difficult to resolve. What should students in Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, or Thailand be able to do with the English language after six, ten, or twelve years of instruction? In an examination driven educational system, performance standards are assessed by a standardized external examination. In other words, what is taught is not always what is tested, or what is taught and tested does not necessarily relate to independent competence or proficiency.

Stating the language content in terms of appropriate learning outcomes and performance standards is difficult, and it is even more difficult to resolve the question of whether one set of learning outcomes is appropriate to the needs of all students, both those who will go to university and those who will clerk at a department store, manage the family shop, or drive a truck. One popular option is to develop performance outcomes based on university preparation and encourage all students to attain these outcomes. But, do all students need a university level of language proficiency? An alternative approach is to develop performance outcomes that describe students more generally as "effective communicators." However, such vague outcomes would likely result in less academic rigor in the English language program leaving potential university candidates at a disadvantage. Unable to resolve this dilemma, curriculum guides often fall short in defining learning outcomes, stating them as broad goals that cannot be properly assessed.

To develop authentic learning outcomes language learning, the teacher should keep in mind that good individual outcomes have three characteristics:

1. appropriate content (what the student should learn),
2. appropriate competence (what the student should be doing), and
3. appropriate setting (the conditions under which the student is performing).

Appropriate content is particularly essential because a student cannot demonstrate anything in any setting without knowledge of the basic content.

Another major challenge of establishing performance-based instruction involves the ability of schools and teacher to make the changes necessary for students to meet both learning outcomes and performance standards. Ideally, performance-based instruction suggests that curriculum and teaching would be reorganized to support student learning and performance. In reality, traditional teaching practices and a mandatory standardized testing program may discourage schools and teachers from changing very substantively. Developing performance-based assessments is time consuming and difficult, and convincing teachers, students, administrators, and parents on the benefits of performance-based instruction can a formidable task. In addition, assessing student performance through methods other than class assignments and standardized
external examinations is frequently viewed as lowering academic standards. Furthermore, the education ministry or the school principals may believe that the schools do not need the restructuring that would result from an application of performance-based principles. Finally, while administrators are interested in school improvement, they are not necessarily interested in a complete rewriting of the schools’ program. Thus, modest, incremental changes within the current curriculum seem to be the only plausible approach. In other words, performance-based instruction should be integrated into the current curriculum in stages.

This is not necessarily as difficult as it might initially appear. Although the usual stated curricular aim for language instruction is “communicative competence”, an English language curriculum often focuses only on declarative knowledge to prepare students for examinations. Declarative knowledge is content information, what is often referred to as “display” knowledge. When students know declarative information, they know what. For example, a student might know what the simple past tense represents or what an irregular verb is and on a test may be able to list the simple past tense of a variety of irregular verbs. However, performance-based instruction would expand the curriculum to address the need for procedural and conditional knowledge that are necessary for communicative goals.

Procedural knowledge includes information about the various actions that must be performed in an operation. It is knowing how. For example, procedural knowledge includes knowing how to use simple past tense. Procedures describe a large range of actions involved in any task in language (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). Conditional knowledge is knowing when and why certain actions are performed or not performed. For example, know when and why one would use present perfect tense rather than simple past tense, and using either independently in communicative situations.

An aim of schooling is for students to learn that which is deemed important in a given subject: in short, to acquire and integrate knowledge. Performance-based instruction does not ignore the importance of declarative knowledge nor work against it. There is no legitimate dichotomy between declarative and procedural knowledge, and declarative knowledge is an essential prerequisite to procedural knowledge, as is illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECLARATIVE KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rules of regular and irregular verb tenses</td>
<td>Telling what happened the day before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative forms of adjectives</td>
<td>Comparing and contrasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of terms</td>
<td>Explaining meaning of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of Indirect speech</td>
<td>Reporting a conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of conditional (If . . . then . . .)</td>
<td>Predicting events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conditional knowledge evolves from declarative and procedural knowledge as one becomes independently proficient in language. However, one cannot become independently proficient if given no opportunities to use language freely and independently. The principles underlying performance-based instruction assume that both the declarative knowledge of content and the procedure knowledge of use must be taught if students are to become proficient and independent with the conditional knowledge that is involved with the thinking and reasoning processes in language use.
However, declarative knowledge does not mean an emphasis on memorizing discrete information. Although knowledge of verb tense, word order, or pronoun antecedents are important, they are meaningless in isolation. Declarative knowledge is most relevant when it illustrates, reinforces, or makes concrete some larger principle of language use. Performance-based instruction therefore does not dispute the importance of content. The challenge facing the teacher is to identify the most useful and essential content and devise strategies on how students can learn and use it.

Despite the necessity of a strong background in declarative knowledge, success in language ultimately depends on procedural knowledge. This is the area of focus in performance-based instruction: the ability of the student to demonstrate use of language. One procedure for helping students understand procedural knowledge at a conceptual level is guided practice, which is based on Vygotsky's ideas on the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) hypothesized that a learner needs the most guidance when working in the zone of development in which he or she has not yet acquired a skill but has some initial idea of it. In short, a learner is guided through the shaping of a skill or operation.

In guided practice, a teacher, or possibly a student who is proficient in the skill, supervises and assists the learner as he or she moves through the process. The job of the guide is to help the learner experience possible difficulties when performing the procedure. During this process, it is also important to point out the different situations in which the skill or operation can be used. In developing independent language use, it is important to work slowly during the early stages of learning a new skill and not demand that students perform with undue speed. Unfortunately, curriculum guides tend to prematurely engage students in a heavy practice schedule and rush them through multiple examples.

The goal in performance-based instruction is for a skill to be internalized; in other words, to practice it in meaningful settings to the point where it can be performed with relative ease and evolve into conditional knowledge. Studies have shown that with sufficient practice, students can internalize skills and operations regardless of their nature (Anderson, 1990). When skills are internalized, students do not need to pay attention to them and can devote more attention to processing and using information. There seems to be no limit to the effects of meaningful practice, though after a certain amount of time the returns certainly diminish.

When applying performance-based standards to teaching language, four questions are considered. First, what do students really need to learn? Many teachers believe that students should master all the skills and operations presented in a lesson. However, students do not need to master everything. To decide which skills and operations to teach, the best approach is to select those that are necessary for students' success. Selecting the skills that actually require attention when learning procedural knowledge is a key curricular decision. Studies have shown that students learn more when they are taught less, but taught well. (Dempster, 1993). Unfortunately, this principle is often ignored in curriculum planning. Some curriculum guides encompass a quantity of language learning tasks that would require a 10-hour teaching day to cover. Teachers may also find too many suggestions in the curriculum guides resulting in lessons that almost no one can realistically teach or adequately assess.
The second question is how do students establish a cognitive model of what they learn? Given the importance of modeling to procedural learning, teachers should plan to include some form of model-building instruction to important skills or operations in a unit that help students establish an initial cognitive model. For example, students whose first language does not inflect verbs for tense (such as Chinese or Malay) usually have difficulty developing a cognitive model of verb inflection for past tense. Without such a model, procedural learning is reduced to trial and error.

Third, how can students be helped to process the information and skills they learn? **Information processing** is an important part of developing procedural and conditional expertise during which learners use prior knowledge to modify the information provided during instruction. Researchers have found that during this stage learners frequently introduce systematic errors into their understanding, for example Chinese speakers neglecting to inflect verbs for tense. It is during the processing phase that students attend to their conceptual understanding of a skill or procedure. When students lack conceptual understanding, they are likely to use procedures in simplistic and ineffective ways. For instance, a Chinese first-language speaker may rely on simple present tense rather than simple past tense forms saying, “I go to town yesterday.” However, teachers often neglect information processing because it demands time, which the typical school schedule works against, and depend entirely on error correction (declarative knowledge). Successful information processing requires teachers to think about the various kinds of errors that can be made and the various contexts in which the skill or procedure might be used to develop competence and proficiency.

Finally, how can students be helped to internalize their learning so that they become independently proficient? The main consideration for this question is how much and what kind of practice will be used. Logically, a teacher schedules several practice sessions spaced fairly close together in the early stages of internalizing a skill or operation. Later, practice sessions are spaced further apart. The teacher must also decide what emphasis is placed on fluency and accuracy during practice. Generally, the more accurate and fluent the performance, the more attention students can devote to dealing with other issues, thus increasing the flexibility of their performance. Unfortunately, because of the constraints of time and demands of the curriculum guides, practice occurs briefly only after the lesson has been introduced, even though the only opportunity students may have for using language is in the classroom.

There are many reasons for teachers to improve student performance. Success at school has never been more important for the children in the global economy. Educational success leads to more and better career opportunities. The more education a child attains, the more choices he or she has. In the 21st Century, East Asia must rely heavily on high levels of education. An educated citizenry is essential for economic prosperity, particularly through the formation of a dynamic and highly skilled work force. The need for unskilled labor is quickly disappearing under the impact of globalization and the technological revolution. East Asian countries cannot settle for anything less than a world-class education system. Teachers must do what they can to make learning happen in their classrooms.
Yet, as mentioned earlier, the dilemma for English language teachers is that students are allowed insufficient time to become independently proficient in English. The greatest problem in teaching is balancing the demand for coverage within the allocated time frame. As long as teachers are compelled to cover everything in each unit in a specific time frame, their students face the prospect of limited proficiency. In teaching language, as in any subject, students must be provided with sufficient time to become involved in their learning so that they can use it independently, not just in the classroom. This is recognized by good teachers, but is frequently ignored by the curriculum guides. Successful language learning is not the amount of declarative knowledge that students can recognize on a standardized examination, but on their ability to use what they have learned independently. Superficial coverage of linguistic structures for examinations is a poor way to help students develop the competence that will prepare them for independent use of language.

Assessment and evaluation in Performance-based Instruction

Another issue facing a performance-based system is reconsidering student assessment and evaluation. Since performance-based instruction requires students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, the assessments used to evaluate their performances become critically important. But, do the English language examinations currently used in East Asian countries assess performance? Although standardized examinations can measure basic levels of skill and knowledge, they are not designed to assess the student’s ability to use language independently. However, often success in an educational program is measured by student results on standardized examinations, which is an ineffective method of determining a student’s competence (Popham, 1999). If the goal is for students to be effective and independent in using English, then performance-based assessments, in addition to standardized testing, are necessary to measure student attainment of performance outcomes. One reason that rethinking assessment is essential is that performance-based instruction contends that students demonstrate their attainment of outcomes.

Performance-based assessment offers several advantages when used with traditional assessment. The most important benefit is the potential for linking teaching and learning: as the student completes each learning task, the teacher uses performance assessment to improve teaching and learning. To ensure success of assessment in performance-based education, two factors must be considered. First is defining learning outcomes and performance standards. Assessment must measure progress toward authentic educational goals, but the learning outcomes must not be so narrowly defined to include only display knowledge while neglecting procedural knowledge, such as effective communication. The second factor is establishing performance standards that determine how student progress is evaluated. A critical decision in evaluation is whether students will be compared to themselves to determine change in their performance (criteria-reference evaluation), or whether they are evaluated by fixed examination requirements that many students cannot meet (norm-referenced evaluation).

Performance-based instruction is based on a criteria-reference approach that focuses on developing each student’s own achievement rather than on identifying and eliminating "underachievers" through a rigid and prescriptive curriculum that evaluates learning through "correct answers" in external examinations. Unfortunately, teachers, parents, and administrators rely on examination results without being aware of how the examinations have been designed. Students are being assessed and evaluated on the basis of tests that educators do not understand (Popham, 2006). Students are entitled to the opportunity to learn, and students
learn best when given opportunities to ask questions, seek solutions, and accept responsibility for their learning.

Performance-based instruction therefore includes **embedded assessment**. Embedded assessment, which means monitoring student understanding during teaching, is essential to confirm that progress is being made and ensuring that all students in the class are meeting both the content and performance standards. Embedded assessment helps the teacher discover as much as possible about each student, to establish starting points for teaching, and to use this information to develop effective classroom teaching procedures. Good language teachers know that they must focus their teaching on the learning needs of each student and to build on their students' strengths in order to remedy their weaknesses. This means discovering what each student does and does not know, can and cannot do. By using embedded assessment, effective English language teachers can monitor their students' learning progress so that they can ensure that all students in their class are operating within their "zones of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Implementing Performance-based Instruction: Getting Students From “Here” to “There”**

At the beginning of this article, it was stated that the best way for students to learn is first to find where they “are,” next to determine where they “should be,” and then to find the best way to get them from "here to there." In any class, some students perform at an acceptable level and others at a high level; but, many students do not reach minimum levels, thereby experiencing failure in the classroom and falling further behind. These students face the prospect of failure after ten or more years of studying English and reduced opportunities after leaving school. Such a situation should be a serious concern for all language teachers, motivating them to set performance standards that are challenging, but that almost every student can achieve. Administrators and teachers should establish realistic goals for meeting appropriate standards over a finite period of time.

Performance-based instruction recommends teaching in a way that ensures that all students have the opportunity to achieve challenging standards of performance. Most conditions that make up performance-based instruction are familiar to teachers and administrators. The difference is in the focus and commitment to ensuring that all students are given well-defined, realistic, and challenging individual outcomes (Glaser, 1984; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997).

Some factors that are associated with performance-based instruction include:

1. high expectations of student achievement (students are more successful when teachers expect them to succeed than when teachers expect them to fail)
2. engaged time on task (students learn more when they are given adequate time to learn)
3. closeness of the content taught to assessment (students show better results when they are tested on what they have been taught)
4. a structured approach focused on the student needs (students perform better when teaching is based on learner needs rather than the number of lessons completed)
5. frequent assessment and corrective feedback (at the end of a lesson or unit, students show better results if they have been assessed during instruction and given corrective feedback)
6. flexible instruction managed by teachers (students succeed more with innovative and creative instruction than with completing routine assignments in the syllabus)
7. students are actively involved in learning (students who actively participate and interact in class perform better than those who passively complete assignments).

An essential factor for student success is the teacher’s attitude: unless teachers believe they can make a difference, the effectiveness of their teaching is seriously limited. The underlying principle of performance-based instruction is that students show progress when they are given sufficient time and support. The principle that students who are engaged in higher-order learning tasks under the right conditions show progress has been supported by research (Resnick, 1998).

Five independent learning strategies have been identified that particularly help English language learners become competent in the academic English (Zwiers, 2004):
   1. Using context to understand meaning
   2. Develop higher-order thinking skills
   3. Read materials that are challenging yet comprehensible
   4. Take risks in academic language
   5. Interact with native speakers about academic topics

To establish a performance-based language class, the teacher can integrate the following procedures at any level:
   1. Interactive oral language activities
   2. Reading interesting material to students
   3. Shared reading activities in which students read to each other
   4. Guided reading lessons
   5. Independent reading activities such as SSR (Sustained Silent Reading)
   6. Modeled writing activities
   7. Language experience activities
   8. Shared writing activities
   9. Guided writing instruction
  10. Independent writing assignments

For example, a teacher could develop a “classroom literacy program” that consists of reading and writing “workshops” conducted in class. Each session begins and ends with a teacher-directed, whole-class activity. However, small-group activities make up the main part of each workshop session, which allows for direct teaching of instructional groups while the rest of the class is working on self-regulated activities. If possible, more proficient students help other students to focus on task and free the teacher for small-group teaching. In this way, the expertise of the teacher is applied at the point of greatest need. This type activity is not only performance-based, but also entirely feasible in a language class at both the primary and secondary levels

Performance-based instruction is affected by school and class organization. Ideally, to engage maximum learning time and focused teaching, it is necessary to ensure that:
   1. the class is organized around the learning needs of students rather than completion of a given number of instructional units
   2. adequate time is allocated for essential learning related to both content and performance standards, and that this time is free from external interruptions,
   3. resources are allocated to support the instructional programme,
4. students who experience problems in learning receive extra time and support;
5. classes are organized in ways that encourage focused teaching and minimize distractions and disruptions.

These considerations give rise to a range of practical issues relating to school and classroom organization such as scheduling and class size, which are beyond the control of the teacher. For example, the issue of ensuring an adequate allocation of time for language instruction is set by the education ministry, not the school principal or teacher. Even when schools have been allocated adequate class time, the actual teaching time is usually much less than the official allocated time because of frequent interruptions, for instance scheduled events such as school assemblies that are often scheduled during learning time, or the withdrawal of students for special activities or excursions. There are also unplanned interruptions such as tardy students entering the classroom, announcements, or dealing with personal issues of individual students. Although some of these interruptions are unavoidable or even desirable, every effort should be made protect the class from interruption.

Finally, performance-based instruction is dependent on effective school leadership. It is important that there is strong leadership within the school that it is directed to ensuring that all is done to enable students to meet the performance standards. Low expectations of student performance and indifference to teaching are best resolved at the administrative level. However, improvement in teaching rarely occurs simply by telling teachers to work harder. It happens because the principal establishes a model of concern and dedication while providing support.
References
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