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FEATURES OF DESIGNING EFFECTIVE TEST ITEMS IN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT: AN UZBEK PERSPECTIVE

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Annotation:

This article examines the key characteristics of well-designed language assessment items within the context of Uzbekistan's educational system. It analyzes current practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in test item development based on international standards while addressing the unique linguistic and cultural considerations relevant to Uzbek language learners.

Keywords: language test design, item development, Uzbekistan, assessment validity, cultural context, multiple-choice items, washback effect, language policy, authenticity, test specifications

Language assessment in Uzbekistan has undergone significant transformation since the country's independence in 1991, shifting from Soviet-era methodologies toward internationally recognized approaches¹. This evolution has paralleled broader educational reforms aimed at enhancing foreign language proficiency—particularly English—among Uzbek students while preserving and strengthening national language competencies. In 2012, Presidential Decree PQ-1875 established new standards for foreign language teaching beginning in primary education, creating greater demand for effective assessment tools across the educational spectrum².

Despite these ambitious reforms, the development of high-quality language test items remains challenging. Test developers and teachers in Uzbekistan must balance international assessment principles with local educational realities, including limited

¹ Hasanova, D. (2007). Teaching and learning English in Uzbekistan. *English Today*, 23(1), p. 5.

² Rakhimov, A. (2016). Development of language assessment in Uzbekistan: Current issues and future directions. *Journal of Language and Education*, 2(4), p. 57.



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resources, multilingual classrooms, and the influence of traditional testing practices. This article examines the essential features of effective test item design in the Uzbek context and offers practical guidelines for improving assessment quality.

Core Features of Effective Test Items

Alignment with Learning Objectives

Effective test items must clearly reflect the learning objectives and language competencies they intend to measure. In Uzbekistan's competency-based curriculum framework, this means designing items that assess not only linguistic knowledge but also communicative abilities across multiple contexts³. For Uzbek test developers, this alignment requires careful consideration of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) descriptors that have been adopted nationally while accounting for students' diverse linguistic backgrounds. Items must target appropriate proficiency levels without disadvantaging learners from regions with limited educational resources.

Cultural Appropriateness and Contextual Relevance

Language test items must be culturally appropriate and contextually relevant to Uzbek learners. Studies indicate that unfamiliar cultural references or contexts can introduce construct-irrelevant variance, disadvantaging students not because of language ability but because of cultural knowledge gaps. Khalilova and Khasanova's research on Uzbek English language learners demonstrated that contextualized test items reflecting local realities significantly improved student performance compared to decontextualized items based on unfamiliar Western scenarios⁴. This finding underscores the importance of developing items that respect and incorporate Uzbek cultural contexts while preparing students for international language expectations.

³ Figueras, N. (2012). The impact of the CEFR. *ELT Journal*, 66(4), p. 479.

⁴ Khalilova, U., & Khasanova, D. (2021). Contextualization in language assessment: A study of Uzbek English learners. *Central Asian Journal of Education*, 6(2), p. 150.



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Technical Quality in Multiple-Choice Items

Multiple-choice questions remain predominant in Uzbek language assessment, particularly in high-stakes examinations like university entrance tests. Designing effective multiple-choice items requires adherence to technical principles that minimize measurement error and maximize discrimination between proficiency levels.

Authenticity and Task Representation

Effective language test items should reflect authentic language use tasks rather than decontextualized knowledge of rules. In the Uzbek context, this principle has gained recognition but remains challenging to implement, particularly in large-scale assessments⁵.

The National Testing Center of Uzbekistan has begun incorporating more authentic materials in recent assessment revisions, though implementation varies across regions and educational levels.

The Uzbek Context: Challenges and Opportunities

Multilingual Considerations

Uzbekistan's complex linguistic landscape—featuring Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, Karakalpak, and other languages—creates unique challenges for language assessment. Test items must account for potential cross-linguistic influence without penalizing students for features of their first language⁶.

Research by Azimova on Uzbek-English bilingual learners indicates that certain error patterns in English assessment can be traced to specific features of Uzbek phonology and syntax⁷. Effective test items should distinguish between developmental language errors and those stemming from cross-linguistic influence, particularly when assessing productive skills.

⁵ Rakhimov, A. (2016). Development of language assessment in Uzbekistan: Current issues and future directions. *Journal of Language and Education*, 2(4), p. 59.

⁶ Hasanova, D. (2007). Teaching and learning English in Uzbekistan. *English Today*, 23(1), p. 6.

⁷ Azimova, S. (2019). Error analysis in English writing of Uzbek EFL learners. *Bulletin of Gulistan State University*, 4, p. 120.



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Educational Resource Disparities

Significant disparities exist between urban and rural educational resources in Uzbekistan, with implications for test item design. Items requiring familiarity with technological tools or specific cultural knowledge available primarily in urban settings can introduce construct-irrelevant variance.

Washback Considerations

Test item design significantly influences teaching practices through washback effects. In Uzbekistan, where high-stakes language examinations directly impact educational and career opportunities, this influence is particularly pronounced.

Designing effective language test items in Uzbekistan requires thoughtful application of international assessment principles while addressing unique local considerations. As the country continues educational reforms aimed at improving language proficiency, attention to test item quality becomes increasingly important for valid measurement and positive instructional impact.

Future research should explore innovative item formats suitable for Uzbekistan's technological infrastructure, investigate the functioning of items across diverse regional and linguistic communities, and examine how test item design can better support the country's multilingual educational goals.

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