

The Big Four Skills: Teachers' Assumptions on Measurement of Cognition and Academic Skills for Non-Native Students



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Introduction

- The four-skills on tests for young native speakers commonly do not generate correlation incongruency concerning the cognitive strategies frequently reported.
- Considering the non-native speakers there are sparse evidence to determine which tasks are important to assess properly the cognitive and academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1980; 2012).

- Research questions: It is of high probability that young students with origin in immigration significantly differ on their communication strategies and skills in a second language processing context (1);
- attached to this first assumption, it is supposed that teachers significantly differ depending on their scientific area and previous training (2).

Methodology

Purpose of the study: This study intends to examine whether school teachers (K-12) as having different origin in scientific domain of teaching and training perceive differently an adapted four-skills scale, in European Portuguese.

- The study involved 77 teachers aged between 32 and 62 years ($M=47$ years, $SD=7.4$), of whom 11 (14.3%) were male and 60 (77.9%) were female, with an average of 22 years teaching experience ($SD=6.7$). Teachers teach at nine schools/groupings in the district of Lisbon, Portugal

- This study demonstrates that teachers effectively value this type of skill less (writing skills according to the audience) and for this reason it appears as one of the items with a lower mean. It seems that for this kind of task, Foreign Language teachers value it less than the Portuguese language teachers, and in the same proportion regarding the valuing of grammar rules.

FLs teachers are the ones who undervalue these two aspects of writing the most, when they should be the most sensitive to the grammar question and sociolinguistics of the audience. However, these data are in line with a meta-analysis study conducted by Graham and Peri (2007) who identified the priorities of teachers in the writing teaching tasks as being teaching strategies and 'peer assistance' to the detriment of grammar, pre-writing activities and processing aspects in texts written by the students. According to studies conducted in the eighties (Scarcella, 1984), L2 writers have major problems in writing for specific audiences, which is related to "attention engaging" (p. 671) during the writing task. One cause may be related to the subject's incomplete proficiency in Mother Tongue (Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000) and to difference in cognitive processing (and therefore different strategies) in the contexts of Mother Tongue and L2 (Silva, 1993).

Implications for policy/Practice

The results presented in this study are an important contribution especially in two aspects: the analysis of teachers' perception of relevant tasks in L2 is pioneer in Portugal. On the other hand, it presents a corpus of results that corroborate and contrast those of previous international studies, with implications for education and concepts of practices that teachers from various scientific fields reveal about L2 teaching and the type of tasks to consider in tests and in the classroom.

Implications for policy/Practice

- The inconsistency in perception and practices across different groups of teachers and respective experiences results from the variability in their responses and from the statistically significant differences in the specific tasks they have chosen as being relevant and irrelevant. However, when compared to the group of teachers from one of the samples of the original study (Rosenfeld, Leung & Ottman, 2001), Portuguese teachers are more positive when differentiating tasks.

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