

PANEL DISCUSSION 1

NATIONAL EXAMS IN ROMANIA

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Things That Should Be Kept

1. Grading system
2. Evaluators (high school teachers)
3. Parts of syllabus
4. National exam
5. Diversity of subjects

Proposed Changes

1. Three types of Baccalaureate: A,B,C (level oriented)
2. Option to sit for any type (according to students' self-evaluation)
3. Syllabus to include a description corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference (A1....C2)
4. Format and Content
The baccalaureate in English – should test all the four skills
- no translation
5. External standards: CEF on the Certificate

Key Words

Transparency

Openness

Training

Flexibility

Training for evaluators, test designers, administrators, invigilators.

Notes taken during the discussion

- What do we test? – competences outlined in the curriculum
 - the new curricula changes from 2008
- Do we test the right things? Is the Bacc a syllabus test or a proficiency test?
 - Should it be a syllabus – based test or should it use an external scale, whether it is CEF or something else?
- What kind of test: with grades(representing amount of knowledge) or a pass or fail test (it tells whether students are up to a certain level)?
- What do we test for? – for certification? The mark doesn't say what the candidates can do. Explanations in terms of “can do” are needed;
- The mark in Bacc. - does not reflect the students' competences and level and is used for admission in universities (for example The Applied Languages College);
 - it makes the students believe that they are competent in certain fields when they are not;
 - no differentiation between levels (just the specification on task papers 1-2; 3-4; 5-7 classes);
 - there is sometimes great discrepancy between the marks obtained in entrance exams at University and the students' grade point average marks in Baccalaureate, or the marks in English or Romanian (3, 2 or 1 in the entrance exam vs. passing marks or high marks in Bacc)
- If the Bacc becomes the “passport” to University, it is the University which should be involved in the design of these tests;
- The assessment is misinforming parents
- False perceptions of one's abilities – many students do not accept the idea of failure. If they enter University they think they should get a degree even if they are very weak
- In Romania there is a tendency to give high marks because there are no benchmarks to refer to (see the differences in marking in different examining centres; some teachers are more lenient others tend to raise marks by comparison)
- Teachers don't mark according to the same standards
- Evaluators disregard the marking scheme
- Our Bacc. – doomed to be subjective (examiner and context of school)
- Solution – an objective test (Objection: obj. tests only test knowledge. Students can cheat)
- An entrance exam needed – exchange of power between Univ. and high schools.

The Washback and Wash-forward Effects of the Bacallaureate Exam
(Workshop – Cristiana Osan and Adriana Vuscan)

Posters

Teachers' point of view – Oral Exam

Ideas brainstormed by participants during workshop

Points to cover	Positive Aspects	Aspects in need of improvement
Test format	-things familiar to the student	-tasks are not consistent (different tasks, see 1-2 classes) -discrepancy between what students are taught and the test format -2 monologues with the same tasks (support your opinions) -the topics do not belong to their areas of interest; they are not suitable for their age -they are not communicative: they do not comply with the communicative approach to language learning (real life situations) -too academic -the reading task is just a prompt for a monologue: tasks are not specifically related to the text
Marking scheme <i>Is it easy to apply?</i> <i>Do you apply it strictly?</i> <i>Is it professional and helpful?</i> <i>Standardisation</i>	-general orientation to what the examiner should take into consideration -its existence	-not easy to apply; difficult to focus both on the marking scheme and the student's performance -we do not apply it strictly (holistic approach); bands of descriptors would

<i>User-friendly criteria</i>		be more helpful in assessing the speaking skill as a whole
Relevance <i>To what extent does it reflect the level of the student?</i> <i>How relevant is it in comparison with the high school curriculum?</i>	-up to a certain extent as far as the curriculum is concerned -different subjects for different levels, graded difficulty	-discrepancy between the objectives of the curriculum and the objectives of the exam -discrepancy between the communicative approach the textbooks are based on and the tasks in the exam -it does not cover all the skills -on the baccalaureate certificate there is no specification of the level (a 10 in 1-2 classes/week is not the same as a 10 in bilingual classes)
Exam Management	-it is a national exam	-teachers should be trained to be examiners -standardisation needed: make sure the examiners have the same understanding of the criteria -it is not piloted at all
Other		

Teachers' point of view – Written exam

Ideas brainstormed by participants during workshop

Points to cover	Positive Aspects	Aspects in need of improvement
Test format	-different types of tasks	-discrepancy between what students are taught and the test format -2 tasks referring to the same skill (essay writing) -too academic -discrepancy between textbooks and task types (e.g. translation, literary texts) -no functional writing (e.g. letters, reports, etc.) no everyday situations
Marking scheme <i>Is it easy to apply?</i> <i>Do you apply it strictly?</i> <i>Is it professional and helpful?</i> <i>Standardisation</i> <i>User-friendly criteria</i>	-it is good to have a common marking scheme	-no or incomplete/debateable answer key for examiners -unclear marking scheme -subjectivity of the examiners involved -gap between what we teach and what we assess
Relevance <i>To what extent does it reflect the level of the student?</i> <i>How relevant is it in comparison with the high school curriculum?</i>	-grades in exam do not differ much from grades in class	-need for extra work in order to prepare for the exam -on the baccalaureate certificate there is no specification of the level (a 10 in 1-2 classes/week is not the same as a 10 in bilingual classes)
Exam Management	-it is a national exam -centralised correction	-teachers should be trained to be examiners -it is not piloted at all levels -too many papers per assessor
Other		

Students' point of view – Written exam

Ideas brainstormed by participants during workshop

Points to cover	Positive Aspects	Frustrations
Tasks	-help	-too academic -discrepancy between textbooks and task types (e.g. translation, literary texts) -lack of graded difficulty from 1-2 classes to bilingual classes -students are not tested from what they were taught -translation??? Literary???
Assessment <i>Transparency</i> <i>Fairness</i> <i>Feedback about oneself</i>	-marks written on exam paper	-no descriptors -feedback: only the grade
Preparation <i>Did it affect the English classes?</i> <i>Which are the best methods to prepare?</i> <i>Is there a balance between preparation and assessment?</i>		-focusing only on preparation for these types of task -not piloted at all levels -the panic created by the fiasco of the written exam in 2003 is still off-putting
Impact <i>Self-awareness</i> <i>Motivation</i> <i>Wash-forward effect</i>	-it motivates the student	-not in line with European standards
Other		-discrepancy between oral and written exam in terms of difficulty

Students' point of view – Oral exam

Ideas brainstormed by participants during workshop

Points to cover	Positive Aspects	Frustrations
Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -help logical thinking -useful in later life (debate and speeches) -accessible for average students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -some are not authentic -no real interaction -not relevant for later life -not extremely challenging for good students
Assessment <i>Transparency</i> <i>Fairness</i> <i>Feedback about oneself</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -most students get high grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -variation of teachers' mood -some students think that the grade does not match their level -all expect to get a 10 -students known as poor students also get a 9 or a 10: no sense of fairness
Preparation <i>Did it affect the English classes?</i> <i>Which are the best methods to prepare?</i> <i>Is there a balance between preparation and assessment?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -lots of exam preparation -no private classes needed -a certain repetition of topics (mostly before 2005) -they can learn to cope with time limits/ pressure -detailed feedback using real criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -boring for the same reason – tendency to repeat topics -almost exclusively exam practice
Impact <i>Self-awareness</i> <i>Motivation</i> <i>Wash-forward effect</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -due to the feedback of the preparation, they get more motivated and self-aware -they learn skills needed for oratory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -negative feedback can be off-putting for some students -no differentiation between weak and good students
Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a lot should be changed

Principles of achieving beneficial backwash (Arthur Hughes - *Testing For Language Teachers*)

- **1. TEST THE ABILITIES YOU WANT TO ENCOURAGE**
- *The tendency is to test what is easiest to test, rather than what is most important to test. It is also important to give sufficient weighting to what is being tested, otherwise we feel we should not waste time preparing for it.*
- **2. SAMPLE WIDELY AND UNPREDICTABLY**
- *If the types of task are limited or the content is predictable, teaching and learning are likely to concentrate on what can be predicted*
- **3. USE DIRECT TESTING**
- *For example, if we want to test writing compositions, then the task should be to write compositions. The texts and the tasks should be as authentic as possible.*
- **4. MAKE TESTING CRITERION-REFERENCED**
- *If students perform the tasks at the criterial level (representing different levels of achievements and proficiency), they can achieve success in the test regardless of how other students perform. This type of testing should encourage positive attitudes to language learning.*
- **5. BASE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS ON OBJECTIVES**
- *If achievement tests are based on objectives, rather than on detailed teaching, they will provide a truer picture of what has actually been achieved.*
- **6. ENSURE TEST IS KNOWN AND UNDERSTOOD BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**
- *The rationale for the test and its specifications should be made available to everyone concerned with preparation for the test.*
- **7. WHERE NECESSARY, PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO TEACHERS**
- *Where tests are meant to help change teaching (eg – to teach communicative skills), support has to be given to help effect the change.*
- **8. PRACTICALITY**

- *A test should be easy to construct, administer, score and interpret. However, one should consider the backwash effect comparing the cost of waste (effort and time) in the case of bad testing and the benefits of low-cost testing and come to the conclusion that we cannot afford **not** to introduce a test with a beneficial backwash effect.*

How can the Baccalaureate exam create a beneficial backwash effect taking into account these principles?

1. If we want to encourage the ability to communicate and interact in English, then we need to set up real life situations in which this is likely to occur (e.g. two people exchanging opinions, negotiating, agreeing, disagreeing, etc.)
2. There should be a variety of task types and content using authentic up-dated materials which refer to aspects of interest.
3. The oral exam as it is at present appears to test one's presentation skills on a given topic. and to express a personal point of view. The competences laid down in the exam objectives also refer to the ability to communicate adequately in a given context (choice of register, appropriate use of language functions), which cannot be tested in this test format. Consequently, reconsideration of test format is needed.
4. The marking scheme used at present is not level-specific and does not describe in detail the specific competencies and their gradual complexity between intermediate and advanced levels. The European Framework of Reference could be used since we aim at European integration. The Baccalaureate should give students a realistic and widely acknowledged indicator of their competencies.
5. It is based on objectives but is there consistency between the approach to teaching, the curriculum and evaluation?
6. Mock tests should be made available for all levels in due time. Teachers and students need to understand the rationale behind choosing this type of evaluation.
7. The type of assessment bears on the methods of teaching, and the other way round: if the communicative approach is currently used in teaching, assessment should be consistent with this approach.

8. Very little or almost nothing has been done to change the current type of evaluation or for training teachers to be examiners, mainly because of lack of funds. The short and long-term effects will leave a mark on the quality of the teaching-learning process.