

# PREPARATORY WORK FOR PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT IN A LINGUISTICS COURSE AT HAI PHONG UNIVERSITY

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Received 10 February 2017

Revised 09 May 2017; Accepted 16 May 2017

**Abstract:** The article discusses the significant contributors to a teacher's preparation for performance-based assessment (PBA) toward learners' success in achieving both the deep knowledge of a linguistics subject and the 21-century skills for English majors at Haiphong University. Through the literature review and document analysis, the pre-implementation process is approached in four major steps that the author adapts from the perspectives proposed by Brown (2003), VanTassel-Baska (2013) and Espinosa (2015): (1) identifying learning outcomes, (2) building the rubric, (3) designing PBA tasks, and (4) supporting the learners. The learners' socio-psychological identity is identified and the nature of the linguistics subjects is depicted in order to enable smooth assistance. The research mainly employs McTighe's (2014) framework and Bloom taxonomy to determine the learning outcomes. Also, another McTighe's (2014) framework is used as the basis to develop the rubric. Through the discussed points, this original research will dedicate to EFL Vietnamese learners' success in PBA through a sophisticated threshold with deep awareness of enhancing learners' learning of not only the knowledge but also the 21st-century skills for their future career. Furthermore, it is expected to fill in the gap in the ELT teachers in the regional community as a source of reference.

*Keywords:* performance-based assessment, linguistics course, learning outcomes, authentic tasks, rubrics

## 1. Introduction

“Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.”

Alexandra Graham Bell

Assessment has become a cutting-edge topic since 1990s, attracting a vast majority of researchers' and educators' concern to identify, classify and justify it. It has ranged from standardized assessment to alternative assessment, and has been approached from divergent perspectives such as assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning

(Brown, 2003). Many scholars disseminate the increasing significance of assessment for learning and assessment as learning, including performance-based assessment (PBA) in the circle of teaching, learning and assessment (Stiggins, 2002; Brown, 2003; Lai 2001; Đoàn, 2014; Lê, 2014; Espinosa, 2015; Dưong, 2016). Regarding the education scenario of Vietnam, Vietnamese Ministry of Education (MOET) has set one of the primary realizations of the objective “holistically innovating the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Vietnam's national education system” as “innovating the methods implemented for assessment and evaluation in foreign language training” (the project “Teaching and Learning Foreign

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Languages in Vietnam's National Education System, period 2008-2020" signed on 30/9/2008). Browsing the tertiary education system in the developed countries and that in Vietnam, Đoàn (2014: 263) depicts that the former has shifted to alternative assessment which functions as a contributor to student learning while a great number of Vietnamese universities still heavily depend on assessment of learning due to various stated and unstated reasons. Haiphong University is of no exception. English majors at Haiphong University really aspire some kinds of assessment which can evaluate their higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, interpretation and evaluation more accurately and enhance more individual confidence than traditional testing owing to their local background and for their future career skills. In my opinion, a careful preparation can be one of the most important factors which can ensure the triumph of PBA implementation in classroom. However, no documentation on the preparation for the process has been found in the academy so far, especially in the field of linguistics subjects taught at university in Vietnam. This article aims at building a threshold toward the success of PBA implementation in classroom by the PBA pre-implementation steps for EFL tertiary learners in a linguistics course at Haiphong University to enhance learner accomplishment in PBA in class and in the future career and to contribute to the research field of PBA in language education.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. *Performance-based assessment: concepts and controversies*

The term alternative assessment has made its advent since the late twentieth century, existing by the standardized testing system

(Duong, 2016: 53). PBA as one form of alternative assessment is utilized to assess the learner capacity in both knowledge and skills. Rudner and Boston (1994) state that PBA is a kind of testing that requires learners to create an answer or a product that demonstrates his/her knowledge or skills, which typically involves oral production, written production, open-ended responses, integrated performance, group performance and other interactive tasks. Echoing that view, O'Malley and Valdez (1996) consider PBA an alternative assessment that requires learners to construct a response, create a product, or demonstrate application of knowledge in authentic contexts. PBA comes into realizations in three such forms (McTighe & Ferrara, 1998) as products, performances, or process-oriented assessments. In short, PBA is a kind of alternative assessment measuring learners' capacities in managing authentic tasks through performance of knowledge and skills.

By comparison, while the traditional standardized testing plays as a valuable information channel to educators, administrators and parents in such a way that it provides them with a sum of knowledge students have gained, PBA directly helps teachers and students reflect the effectiveness of their teaching and learning in their daily class, from which further development can be traced. Also, standardized assessment gives no feedback to learners, especially the low scorers, to explain why they get such a result. Furthermore, standardized testing only takes place at a certain moment when unexpected incidents can affect learners' scoring, and it contains distractors which can be considered traps for low-proficiency learners (Abedi, 2010). To be fair, this assessment tool, if done properly, can have some constructive effects, but PBA seems to have more priority in this function. The positive washback of PBA on teaching and learning can be shown clearly when teachers can immediately collect information on learners' learning process and

product to serve their pedagogical purpose of promoting both learners' and teachers' progress. PBA can test a wider range of competences other than just linguistic competence, like critical thinking and problem solving, as well as add support to the inferences teachers make based on the test scores as learners are asked to perform similar types of tasks to those that they encounter outside of the testing context (Fastré et al., 2010). In other words, PBA allows teachers to look at the learner capacity via contextual performance (ValTassel Baska, 2013) and use the received information for diagnostic and instructional purposes (Abedi, 2010). In addition, PBA equips learners with more learning experience and strategies (Brualdi, 1998). In order to perform, learners have to prepare by investigating the content, searching model performances and getting experiences from the models and even their peers. With PBA, learners become more confident and motivated for it focuses on progress and achievement (Stiggins, 2001). The conspicuous impact of PBA is learners can be exposed to both others' performances and teachers' direct constructive remarks to improve their amount and quality of knowledge and the skills they have acquired from which a pathway for their future learning can be traced more effectively. Especially, PBA not only helps teachers build up their learner capacity, but offers them the self-reflection (Espinosa, 2015). Observing the performance of learners who come from different backgrounds and own different innate capacities can enable teachers to realize their own strengths and weaknesses.

There exists a paradox that although PBA is considered a trendy assessment form, it is not favored by many teachers (Brualdi, 1998; Chew & Lee, 2012). Firstly, the teachers feel they have insufficient knowledge to measure their students' performance (Airasian, 1991). For example, not only is the knowledge from the course book presented but ample

information can occur in the performance, some of which can be out of the teachers' control. Secondly, some teachers can ever experience the unsuccessful execution or the inconclusive results of PBA (Stiggins, 1994; Lai, 2011) because conducting PBA in classrooms requires a set of criteria such as students' knowledge, students' manner, and students' problem-solving skill, whereas traditional standardized tests measure the result conclusively, for instance just true or false. It is also a time-consuming assessment tool (Espinosa, 2015) in design, administration and assessment. To make the matter worse, the reliability and validity of PBA are questioned when scores and grades can change across the times and across the teachers (Espinosa, 2015). Furthermore, there are irrelevant constructs like gender, ethnicity, race, linguistic background, and socioeconomic status which should be cared when PBA is conducted (Lam, 1995).

By way of conclusion, PBA can be defined as an assessment tool which can measure students' products through their demonstration of application of knowledge and skill in the authentic setting. Despite its stated demerits, teachers are highly recommended to implement it in their class for the sake of their learners' professional development. To reduce its possible downsides like the variables in assessing results or the cumbersome nature of managing the tool, teachers should consider certain factors prior to PBA application in their class.

## *2.2. Researchers' suggestions to the implementation of PBA in classroom*

Researchers have figured out necessary "shoulds" to be considered when assessment in general and PBA in particular is utilized in the class. First and foremost, the overall principles of assessment can be stated as follows:

- (1) Assessment should serve learning,
- (2) Multiple measures provide a richer picture,
- (3) Assessment should align with goals,
- (4) Assessment should measure with matter, and
- (5) Assessment should be fair.

McTighe (2014: 2)

The first principle can be briefly understood that assessment should inform and upgrade learner learning. The second conveys the idea that teachers should vary assessment forms; therefore, learners have more opportunities to express their capacity in learning, from which a holistic result can be achieved. Especially, assessment forms ought to meet the set goal of the course. For example, the goal of a language course is learners' fluency in speaking should be reached by an oral assessment rather than a written one. In addition, assessment cannot cover all the aspects of learner exposure but teachers should focus on the most important point. Last but not least, learners should be given equal access to learning opportunities, while teachers should be trained to have an appropriate attitude and skill to manage the assessment.

PBA, as a type of assessment, should be assured with the same five above-mentioned features. To be more specific, Brown (2003), Van Tessel Baskha (2013) and Espinosa (2015) have made further recommendations. Initially, the goal of the performance should be stated. This echoes with number (3) from McTighe's view (2014: 2). In other words, it is the leaning outcomes which should be set prior to teaching. The next step will be specifying the performance criteria, which can be actualized in a reliable checklist or a rubric. PBA is stated to be challenging for many examiners and to be unsatisfying to many performers simply because differing examiners working on

the same performance may release differing scores. Hence, a list of detailed criteria can minimize the variety among the examiners and, concurrently, provide the performers with some explanations leading to their gains. Particularly, the specified marking scheme delivered before the performance can act as a guide for the performers toward their achievement. Then, teachers should be conscious of pedagogical rules. For instance, the tasks assigned to learners should go from the easy level to the more complicated one. Instructions should be given comprehensively before their autonomous activities. Teachers should keep in mind that sufficient and comprehensible input can promise an effective output. Furthermore, the assessment objective should consist of not only contents but skills such as higher order thinking skill and problem solving skill. As it is well-known in the contemporary life, learners' accumulation of skills are increasingly gained educators' interest because contents are almost ubiquitous at the click of a finger while skills need to be trained and practised appropriately in a certain environment. Skills to think critically or to solve the problem promptly are vital in a person's life but they can hardly be sharpened without a good trainer. It is also important that teachers should have a right attitude toward treating performances as opportunities to give positive feedback to learners and provide it systematically. Learners need to be informed their strengths and weaknesses in details after their show, from which they can intensify the gains while diminishing the downsides. Lastly, encouraging self-assessments and peer-assessments judiciously is recommended. This contributes to boosting learner autonomy in their study through self-reflection and learning from the others' jobs.

In brief, some first considerations before utilizing PBA can be actualized

as teachers' identifying the learning outcomes, creating the rubric, designing PBA tasks and selecting the pedagogical methodology for students to perform the tasks and reach the learning outcomes successfully. It is highly recommended that those who favor PBA should keep in mind that their conduct of the tool will serve learner progress toward fulfilling the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning outcomes.

### *2.3. Linguistics course significance and linguistics course assessment*

Linguistics subjects are integral components in any professional language programmes, and their role has long been backed up firmly by Saussure (1973), Lyon, 1981), Cantón (1990). It is argued that linguistics is the science of language. Grasping firm knowledge of theoretical linguistics does benefit language teachers and any other language students since linguistic knowledge of grammar, phonetics and phonology, semantics, and the like assists their understanding and utilizing language professionally. Linguistics has a paramount importance for language learners by equipping them with not only language but also practical and intellectual skills, naming teamwork skill, critical thinking and analytical skill, written and oral communication, logical reasoning, creative and innovation, and information literacy. However, an insight into the database shows no research details about the application of PBA to assess students in linguistics courses, except for application of PBA in language assessment in general.

Traditionally, at Haiphong University a linguistics course, semantics taken as an example, is considered mainly to provide knowledge and certainly some skills of investigating materials and applying the knowledge to solve theoretical tasks.

Most summative assessment is applied to measure learners' achievement, while formative assessment has not been conducted professionally. Nonetheless, the pedagogical view today has changed (Kelly, 2016), when additional skills are urgently required. Learners need to be exposed to authentic tasks and are equipped with skills to handle them. Presently, there are two trends toward the assessment of a linguistics course: summative assessment in the middle of and at the end of the course and formative assessment, especially PBA, throughout the course. There exists a situation that not all teachers conduct PBA with a sophisticated framework which may lead to little effectiveness of learner learning. For example, the learners performed and were assessed but no detailed feedback was provided from the teacher and other audience; therefore, their strengths and weaknesses were not obviously pointed out to serve their future development. Furthermore, when a group of learners performed, other learners heavily depended on them and became passive without effective participation. Consequently, despite acquiring the knowledge and skills of the whole course, the performers tended to be only good at the part they were accountable for.

In conclusion, the crucial role of linguistics courses for language majors and the current situation of assessing them voice a need for the thorough preparation prior to the implementation of PBA at Haiphong University.

## **3. Preparatory work**

### *3.1. Identifying the learning outcomes*

Overall, the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners are expected to have the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning

outcomes. The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (McTighe, 2014) has portrayed the new generation with

(1) Learning and innovation skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, etc.),

(2) Information, Media and Technology Skills,

(3) Life and Career Skills (initiative and self-direction, among others), and

(4) Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes (global awareness, financial literacy, etc.).

To be specific, the first set includes Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Communication and Collaboration. The second set contains Information Literacy, Media Literacy, and ICT (Information, Communications and Technology) Literacy. The third kit requires learners to have Flexibility and Adaptability, Initiative and Self-Direction, Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, Productivity and Accountability, and Leadership and Responsibility. It is apparent that the previously-mentioned knowledge and skills should be shaped by teachers in specific courses, and the content of the subject is just a component in the set, whereas a variety of skills are required. The integration of four factors cannot reach immediately but gradually in a course and in the curriculum; they should be obviously stated and gradually acquired.

Unlike four skills in language learning and teaching, theoretical linguistic subjects are expected to equip learners with content so that for a long time in Vietnam, language learners have mainly approached the knowledge written in the book, with teachers' dominance in class. Compared to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, at that time, learners' major learning process goes through remembering and understanding the concepts, applying them to do theoretical

exercises. Analyzing the materials is also done but not frequently. The levels of evaluating and creating seem not to be the focus. Later on, when the learner-centred class becomes prevalent, educators have to raise their awareness that learners need not only knowledge but skills for their potential working world. Learning outcomes of a linguistic course still surely consist of the content acquisition, surrounded by a set of skills, especially application, evaluation and creation. Among her set of learners' learning outcomes, Kelly (2016) mentions learners' outcomes as: "attaining an in-depth knowledge of linguistics...; examine critically, synthesize and evaluate knowledge in the various sub-areas of linguistics...; develop the capacity to participate in learning and problem solving activities individually and collaboratively in groups; and demonstrate excellent interpersonal and decision-making skills through their participation in small group problem solving activities."

With regard to the educational setting at the Foreign Language Department of Haiphong University, the number of classes is small and each teacher is an expert in one or two courses; therefore, he/she usually functions as the agent to set the learning outcomes. After that, the product is discussed in a group of experts for elaboration. This is assuredly conducted before the selection of contents, methodology and assessment forms. Aside from that, like many other local universities in Vietnam, Confucianism still dominates learners' behavior in class where learners often follow teachers' models and instructions.

In a normal language curriculum, a linguistics course is provided on the premise of learners' high proficiency of four language skills; however, at Haiphong University the percentage of learners owning low English

proficiency background is really high, many learners still need to improve their language performance in communication, including intelligible pronunciation and presentation skills. Those are the means to transfer messages to the listeners. More important than that, learners need to show the evidence of their clear understanding of contents, practical application to solve real-world problems, effective analysis, evaluation of the material and creation of their own product.

With the researcher's experience from the real context and the updating of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning outcomes, the goal of a linguistics course at Haiphong University can be stated as follows:

At the end of the course, learners are able to:

- (1) develop their autonomous investigation of the material content with an in-depth knowledge of linguistics,
- (2) apply the knowledge to solve linguistic exercises and bridge to other language subjects or real-life situations,
- (3) utilize problem-solving skills, higher order-thinking skills, time management skill, collaborating skill, IT skills to prepare, present the performance as well as feedback the questions from the audience,
- (4) evaluate the materials provided by teachers and from other sources to serve the focus of the performance,
- (5) show their positive attitude toward their performance and their peers,
- (6) assess their performance and their peers' performance, and
- (7) create their attractive performance.

### 3.2. Building the rubric

By definition, a rubric (or a criteria sheet, a grading schemes, or a scoring guide) is a criteria-

based tool that is used in conjunction with open-ended performance tasks, having no single correct answer and revealing the performance expectations (Mueller, 2016; McTighe, 2014).

In PBA, a rubric plays a pivotal role for the reason that it keeps everyone informed of an open set of criteria. The society, school administrators, parents and teachers all know the knowledge and the skills students are expected to perform and all can have ideas about them as an effective collaboration to produce the work efficacy of the next generation. In addition, a transparent criteria sheet can ensure the fairness in assessment when comparison is likely to occur and teachers' assessment criteria is not a hidden face to learners. The access to a well-developed, objective and validated scoring sheet of a performance-based task is the initial factor to reach a reliable and valid score (Abedi, 2010). Therefore, a teacher needs to exploit or can build an appropriate assessment rubric or a checklist. This can be done through the teachers' experience, the available references sources, consultation with colleagues, and discussion with learners. Especially, intervening learners in building the rubric can encourage their autonomy by giving their right in deciding their own learning goals and their learning strategy to the achievements. Learners' contribution to the rubric can be served for themselves or as an experience for the learners in the later courses. As a result, a consensus can be reached to shape the rubrics.

A yielding rubric should:

- (1) clearly define criteria for judging learner performance;
- (2) promote more consistent evaluation of learner performance;
- (3) help clarify instructional goals and serve as teaching targets;
- (4) provide specific feedback to learners and teachers;

- (5) help learners focus on the important dimensions of a product or performance;
- (6) support criterion-based assessment

(McTighe, 2014: 45)

Two widely-known types of rubrics are analytic and holistic (McTighe, 2014; Mueller, 2016). The former which spells out levels of performance and each criterion is assessed separately, is opposed to the latter which provides a single score for the whole performance. The analytic rubric is said to be more complicated and time-consuming but its constructive impact is highly favoured by its advocates. Its specific criteria, weighting, and descriptors allow all the participants and the observers to get the detailed feedback of the strengths and weaknesses of learners' performance.

The analytic rubric for learners in a linguistics course at Haiphong University should be adapted from the framework suggested by McTighe (2014) and Mueller (2016). Both of them show at least two indicators, calling Criteria and Scale. The criteria are established basing on learner needs, learning outcomes as well as the SMART formula (specific, measurable, attainable, reliable and time-bound). Scale composes Poor, Average, Good and Excellent. A Descriptor can be integrated in the rubric to specify the criteria (Mueller, 2016). Descriptors enable a more concise and consistent judgment from any assessor. The practical process of reaching the following rubric is a convergence of my own experiences with my learners' performances, my former students' contribution of their experience and expectation and the formal seminar in my linguistics division.

Sheet 1. A detail rubric of PBA in a linguistics course at Haiphong University

Scale Criteria	Weighting	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Language proficiency	1	Obvious problems with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar which cause difficulties in audience's understanding Occasional fluency	A few problems with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar which cause a few difficulties in audience's understanding Occasionally unnatural interruptions	Intelligible pronunciation with some minor problems, appropriate vocabulary, and grammar which may cause few difficulties in audience's understanding Few interruption	Confident and natural pronunciation Appropriate and accurate range of vocabulary and grammar All audience comprehension Fluent and expressive speech
Cultural convention for oral presentation	1	Inappropriate cultural physical expressions and audience addressing	Appropriate cultural physical expressions and audience addressing, with some noticeable mistakes	Appropriate cultural physical expressions and audience addressing, with few mistakes	All appropriate and attractive cultural physical expressions and audience addressing
Organization	1	Insufficient presentation parts Uneven role of presenters Crumbling discourse	Sufficient presentation parts Uneven role of presenters Some crumbling discourse	Sufficient presentation parts Even role of presenters Cohesive discourse	Sufficient and Attractive presentation parts Appropriate role of presenters Smooth discourse

Content	3	No/Weak term definition No/Weak illustration Inaccurate information Insufficient information	Appropriate term definition but weak illustration or vice versa Some inaccurate information Some insufficient information	Appropriate term definition but Appropriate illustration or vice versa Accurate information Sufficient information	Appropriate term definition but appropriate, detailed and comprehensive illustration Accurate information Sufficient information
Problem-solving skill	1	No/Slow reaction to occurred problems from presenters themselves and from the audience (technical problem, audience question, etc.)	Appropriate but slow or occasionally unsatisfactory reaction to occurred problems from presenters themselves and from the audience	Appropriate and satisfactory reaction to occurred problems from presenters themselves and from the audience	Appropriate and highly persuasive reaction to occurred problems from presenters themselves and from the audience
Time management	1	Uneven time distribution to each member/presentation part Over 10% overtime or under-time allotment	Generally appropriate time distribution From 5% to 10% overtime or under-time allotment	Generally appropriate time distribution Under 5% overtime or under-time allotment	Totally appropriate time distribution
Visual aids	1	No/Weak computer literacy Inappropriate visual/audio aids	Average computer literacy, sometimes in need of help Some inappropriate visual/audio aids	Good computer literacy, rarely in need of help Few inappropriate visual/audio aids	Good computer literacy, All and attractive appropriate visual/audio aids Creative exploitation of visual/audio aids
Critical thinking	1	No/Weak ability to analyse or evaluate material or audience' questions/opinion No/Weak ability to argue for or against an issue	Average ability to analyse or evaluate material or audience' questions/ opinion with some misunderstanding Average ability to argue for or against an issue with some weak points	Satisfactory ability to analyse or evaluate material or audience' questions/ opinion with little misunderstanding Satisfactory ability to argue for or against an issue with some strong points	Highly persuasive ability to analyse or evaluate material or audience' questions/ opinion with little misunderstanding Highly persuasive ability to argue for or against an issue with strong points

The rubric is integrated with the scoring sheet having eight criteria with weighing, four ranks and space for the assessor's comment. The criteria are explained by their descriptors, ranging from language to the skills, while the four ranks from *poor* to *excellent*. Beside the column of criteria, the weighing column can meet the demand of a traditional mark-10 system of Vietnam. Almost all items get 1 point except "Content" accounting for 3

points because the rubric is used to measure a content course. In the past, most of the weighing is for contents but the perspective should be changed to adapt the learner needs. Moreover, discrete points are suggested to minimize the diversity in assessing. It would take the assessor more time and energy but it promises rich values in the assessment process for all the relevant participants.

Sheet 2. The scoring sheet for PBA in a linguistics course at Haiphong University

Criteria \ Scale	Weighting	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Language proficiency (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency)	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)
Cultural convention for oral presentation (greetings, gestures, stance and eye contact, manner, question answering).	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)
Organization (3-part presentation, cohesion, even role in the group, smooth step transference)	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)
Content (Term definition, explanation, detail, accuracy, activity, evaluation, creativity)	3	(0-1)	(1.5-2)	(2.5-2.75)	(2.75-3)
Problem-solving skill (reaction to the problem, response to audience's questions)	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)
Time management (for separate parts, for each member, for the whole presentation)	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)
Visual aids (ability to exploit IT for presentation aids with clarity, impression, appropriateness, relevance)	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)
Critical thinking (ability to analyze arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems)	1	(0-0.4)	(0.4-0.6)	(0.7-0.85)	(0.9-1)

3.3. Designing the performance-based tasks

PBA belongs to authentic assessment which measures an authentic task. Therefore, prior to the implementation of PBA, it is compulsory for teachers to create performance-based tasks to their learners.

In the first place, an awareness of the concept and characteristics of a performance task should be made clear. By definition, a performance task is the task that requires learners to perform their knowledge, skills and proficiency in the learning context (McTighe, [20]). Research provides seven characteristics of performance tasks, which are:

- (1) demand thoughtful application of knowledge and skills, not just recall;
- (2) yield tangible products and performances that serve as evidence of learning;
- (3) establish authentic contexts for performance;

- (4) can integrate two or more subjects as well as 21st century skills (e.g., critical thinking, technology use, teamwork);
- (5) do not have a “single, best” answer or one, “right way” to accomplish the task;
- (6) evaluate performance with established criteria and rubrics; and
- (7) may be used as rich learning activities and/or assessments.

(McTighe, 2014: 10)

Then, the process of designing a performance-based task will follow McTighe’s framework (2014). It undergoes eleven steps, beginning with identifying learning goals and culminating in delivering the task for learners. Regarding our specific courses, learning goals or learning outcomes have been specified above. The second step is to consider key traits implied by the goals, which refer to the criteria used to measure the learning outcomes. The next step is to

consider some frameworks of understanding such as Six Facets of Understanding, followed by Generating initial task ideas, and Checking for validity and alignment. The sixth phase will focus on the authentic situation to see whether the task links to the real world. Till now, teachers can develop the rubric, modify it for the specific learners. After that, the designers should self-assess the task, consulting colleagues and experts, using a rubric. Learners can play a role of evaluating the rubric before it is ready for use. When the quality control of the assessment rubric has completed, teachers can explain the criteria and their exploitation before the formal launching commences. The revision after the rubric functions has a significant role in improving its quality. Hereby, it is necessary to explain the frameworks of understanding naming Six Facets of Understanding. Understanding can be shown through explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, self-knowledge and empathy. The perspective facet is demonstrated by the ability of analyzing, arguing, criticizing or comparing. Empathy refers to the openness or beliefs, while self-knowledge means being able to realize, reflect and self-assess.

At Haiphong University, before a linguistics course commences, the preparation of an instructional manual to the course follows the framework by McTighe (2014). To cut it short, firstly, the learning outcomes are determined as shown in the previous part of this research. From the learning outcomes, the performance-based task will be set in such a way that it creates the opportunities for learners to fully demonstrate their ability, i.e, knowledge and skills, in the authentic learning context with a concise and reliable assessment rubric. For example in the semantics course, learners are divided into groups and they randomly pick up two topics they have to be in charge, one of which for the first round or the first half of the course

whereas the remaining is for the second after they have received detailed feedback from the first show. With regard to the rubric, it will be delayed till the next part which discusses the building of a rubric. Consequently, we have the course instruction sheet which consists of five major elements, beginning with the course outline, which lists the major contents of the course distributed in 15 weeks. At my university, the formal semester takes place within 15 weeks. Another important part is the course book and references, followed by learners' duty and task, teacher's duty, assessment form and assessment criteria. Although, performance-based tasks can vary their forms as products, performances, or process-oriented assessments (McTighe & Ferrara, 1998) and can be transformed via the written or spoken channel, groups' oral presentation, which majorly belongs to the second type, is selected for learners because it can most satisfy their needs, best display the learning outcomes, and closely relate to the attributes future employers expect. A big hindrance of typical Vietnamese learners, including their Confucian learning environment and their background, has made my learners introvert and shy to speak in public. A task demands oral presentation will create them the chance to interact in English in the authentic situation. It can reveal learners' language skills, technology skills, presentation skills beside their content comprehension. Group-work will elaborate the collaboration spirit. Learners also have more chances to be exposed and exploit IT. According to NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) (McTighe 2014), among the 21<sup>st</sup>- century skills future bosses seek from their employees, leadership and ability to work in team account for 77.8% each. Ranked the second is problem-solving skill (70.8%), followed by analytical skill (68%), verbal communication skill (67%),

and computer skill (62.8%). Opponents can argue that NACE gives the data for American employees which does not work in the Vietnamese context. However, proponents will render the concept of “global citizen” to refute that view. If we interview the Vietnamese employers whether they need those skills from their laborers, the answer will surely be “yes”. Those criteria match almost all working situations. Therefore, our Vietnamese teachers when training learners have to remember that they are preparing for the next Vietnamese working generation who have strong qualities to integrate into the global working context. In brief, when compared to the given framework for designing a performance-based task, oral group presentation can meet the most demand both in short term and long term, especially when mastering English should be shown by the capacity to orally communicate with others in English.

While assigning the task to learners, teachers need to instruct how the task should be performed and what criteria learners should pay attention to. For the first idea, learners are required to read the assigned points in the course book, work in group, find the other resources, consult teachers when in need, prepare slideshow, allot two thirds time of one formal lesson in order to leave time for the class follow-up activities like discussion, debate, self-reflection, peer-reflection and teacher comment. The organization of the presentation requires an opening before developing and closing. Within the opening activity, the presenter is asked to lead to audience to the topic smoothly and compellingly. The development will discuss the content of the presentation such as definition and classification. The closing should include some designed tasks to bridge the knowledge gained in the content to solve the exercises in this subject, other subjects

or the real-life problem. All group members must evidentially show their role in the presentation. An application of the linguistics theory to solve the real life problem must be shown. For example, an understanding of meaning transference in the course Semantics can be applied to encode and decode a real-life conversation. The knowledge of aspects of connected speech in the course Phonetics and Phonology can be used to explain problems in listening to the native speakers and improve the Vietnamese EFL learners in listening and speaking. Also, an analysis of sentence structures in the course Grammar will effectively serve writing or translation. A G.R.A.S.P.S. structure (McTighe, 2014) can help learners raise their awareness of what they are going to do. That means learners can set their GOAL of the presentation, their ROLE in that context, their AUDIENCE, their SITUATION, their PRODUCT/ PERFORMANCE and their STANDARD and CRITERIA for success. To clarify this, the goal of the presentation aligns with the learning outcomes set in the previous part of this study. The learner role will be the performer and also the self-assessor. Two inherent types of audience in the normal classroom situation are the teacher and the performer’s classmates, which require the performer wisely address the content and channel of presentation. Then, the performer must keep in mind whether their products meet the criteria of the rubrics which have been agreed and public.

In short, prior to while-PBA, authentic tasks for the performance should be well designed with reference of McTighe’s framework (2014). The instruction of the task belongs to the teacher’s role while giving the learners an opportunity to design and perform the task can maximize their ability which evidentially presents Bloom’s taxonomy of learning and their autonomy.

### 3.4. Supporting the learners

#### 3.4.1. Being conscious of the learners' socio-cultural identity

In the light of the learner-centered approach, teachers need to understand their learners' identity, consisting of their habitual behavior in class and their learning experience.

Firstly, with regards general learners' classroom reaction, I render two Vietnamese scholars' finding as follows. Trinh (2005) states that the underlining philosophy of the teaching culture in Vietnam is Confucianism in which the teacher-learners relationship is shaped in a fixed mould with learners' heavy dependence both teachers both inside and outside class. Echoing, Le (2000) calls the English classroom a "cultural island" where the teacher plays many different roles such as *the knowledge provider, the feedback giver, the evaluator and the high-pass-rate guarantor*, whereas the learners are expected to be *good listeners and imitators*. The learning outcome is learners can understand, remember the transferred knowledge and apply it to deal with pedagogical exercises. This passive learning style, despite its gradual erosion in the modern educational modes, still has its strongly negative impact on a number of learners at all the levels of education in Vietnam in contradiction to the fact that the more mature learners grow, the more independent they become. To be more specific with EFL learners, Vietnam's pre-university English education focuses on grammar, reading, and some writing. Listening, speaking as well as social skills are largely excluded from the practice. English is taught as a subject, not as a means of communication or a means to another task. The English class hours for them are restricted to three hours per week and they almost have no time for performing any authentic task themselves. At the end of

the course, their completion is marked by the completion of multiple-choice question exam. A little bit more complicated task for the students who want to pass the university entrance examination to a language institution is writing a 100-word-length composition of a familiar given topic. That teaching and assessment form can answer the parents what their children have gotten from school and answer school administrators what teachers have provided to their learners. Nonetheless, the WHAT here does not satisfy the employers in the society. Haiphong University EFL learners are of no exception, with the typical learning behavior of Vietnamese learners. To make the matter worse, most of them come from the rural part of the city or other neighbor provinces and have a modest English score for the entrance university examination. Their autonomous learning skill is limited. So is their presentation skill. In fact, having undergone 4 semesters to be trained in 4 English skills, they still need more teachers' assistance to understand the contents, to express it out persuasively and to acquire important skills. To a plenty of traditional teachers, the best approach to linguistics subjects is teacher lecturing and student note-taking for two principal reasons, including the perplexing nature of the subjects and guarantee of the summative assessment result. Nonetheless, such philosophy is being criticized for not meeting the social demand in the future job market if the learners are served merely the course content, excluding academic skills shown through their performance; and such assessment is of learning, not for learning.

Consequently, PBA, a type of assessment-for-learning or assessment-as-learning, will make the amendment by re-rolling learners from passive agents in the past model to active ones, from listeners to speakers (or performers), and emphasizing their high

integration and accountability in their study and preparing them for a better future with not only knowledge but skills as well.

#### 3.4.2. *Supporting the learners*

In the innovative education form, learners are the centre and teachers have to give them opportunities to develop their full capacity. There are 3 major aspects the teacher will care before the learners' performance takes place, then assessment is applied to measure the success of their performance.

In the first place, materials can be adapted as we know that the content of linguistics materials is hard to read, and not all the contents of the book will be discussed within a 15-week course. "Good teachers are always adapting materials" (Maley 1998:248). The idea of 'flexi materials' which suggests designing materials with greater flexibility also seems to accept that it is the teachers who need to decide what materials are best for their learners, as they are more aware of the needs, interests and the context of their learners than anyone else. For those who are at a limited level of language, the contents which are too theoretical or abstract can be eliminated, giving the way to the more practical ones. For example, in the chapter "Sentence meaning" in Semantics, a thorough discussion of semantic function of participants according to Halliday's point of view takes so much time but it just contributes very little to their current learning.

The next action toward the learners' triumph is a clear instruction. Whether the learners follow the right track or not depends on this stage. This is carried out with the course instruction sheet which has been mentioned in the above part of **Designing authentic tasks**. The learners should be well-informed of their role in class. The crucial role is the performer in accordance with the assessor in both self-assessment and peer-assessment. In order to give a relatively fair assessment, the teachers

should make sure the learners understand their learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Two sheets are delivered from the first lesson with sheet 2 will be copied into the number of the learners in the class. Learners are given time to discuss the descriptors and raise questions or make any contribution. The first performance will be considered a trial where the learners play their roles the first time and teachers give thorough comments. In addition, study sites for both linguistics knowledge and the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills should be introduced. An emphasis on the improvement of skills needs to be done because with good skills, the learners can have the right key to open to the wanted door.

Last but not least, creating motivation to students is extremely compulsory in language achievement. It is affirmed by a plethora of language researchers that motivation functions as the most important contributor to the overall accomplishment of language acquisition (Al-Ghamdi, (2014). Motivation is strongly affected by attitude (Gardner, 2010). He goes further to state that motivation to learn a second language is influenced by group related, context related attitude, integrativeness and attitudes towards the learning situations respectively. The task done by group presentation can satisfy the condition of group related where learners can share and improve their learning experience. Specific tasks will be put in the specific context for context-related attitude. The teachers' capacity of bridging the necessity of the knowledge and skills to the solution to real-life problems will also inspire the learners. Besides, motivation is also created when the learners can have the right to decide what and they want to learn and to be assessed. That means that the teachers should enhance learner autonomy. They will certainly be accountable for their final product. The teachers should highlight the one-third class-hour discussion, where

the presenters show their understanding to the knowledge and their ability to solve the problem occurring in the presentation. Some special gifts or generous comments/ marks should be given to those who have made an impressive effort. The learners also need an additional opportunity to better their previous work. Teacher's giving them this can be considered another form of motivation which can pave the way to their success.

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendations

##### 4.1. Conclusions

In conclusion, PBA, or a kind of constructive assessment tool to boost learners' capacity through authentic tasks, is increasingly being encouraged to be used in classroom context because it can train and assess the learners' knowledge of a subject and skill in that subject which can be extendedly transferred to other subjects or other authentic tasks in real-life. It provides all the education-related agents such as parents, teachers and students with a kit of transparent assessment criteria. A more valuable impact of PBA is it builds up learners' capacity throughout constructive feedbacks, which benefit all learners, especially those who are in low proficiency. For such reasons, PBA should be exploited smartly in English linguistics courses at Haiphong University. Toward a reliable and valid PBA results for learners, teachers need to have an effective preparation with four steps from naming the learning outcomes, creating the rubrics, designing the authentic tasks and assisting the learners toward their accomplishment. For low-proficient EFL learners in a local learning context like Haiphong University in Vietnam, the needs of sharpening real-life skills are of the crucial important aside from accumulating the linguistics knowledge. An appropriate form of assessment will dedicate to that

goal. As suggested and also applied, PBA will really help when the teachers can raise their students' awareness of their learning outcomes and intervene them in determining their own learning outcomes. From the goals, students should be informed of the assessment criteria, which will help them feel confident to make the road to meet such obvious demands. Teachers need a firm knowledge of PBA assessment regarding designing authentic tasks and presentation rubric, but they must adapt it to their own context and made an endeavor to keep the assessment result fair.

##### 4.2. Recommendations

Limitations cannot be avoided in this research, which need to be delimited by the author herself as well as the readers. For example, a contrastive analysis of the results of two groups of language learners, one of whom exploits PBA whilst the other follows the traditional assessment, will be conducted to evidentially support the application of PBA. Or, the learners' and teachers' beliefs and practices of PBA in a language classroom can be another interesting research field. Research on various aspects related to assessing a language course or linguistics course can dedicate to the development of the ELT community in the Vietnamese context.

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# CÔNG TÁC CHUẨN BỊ TRƯỚC KHI ĐÁNH GIÁ CHẤT LƯỢNG HOẠT ĐỘNG CỦA SINH VIÊN TRONG KHÓA HỌC NGÔN NGỮ TẠI ĐẠI HỌC HẢI PHÒNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài báo trình bày các khâu quan trọng giúp giáo viên Đại học Hải Phòng chuẩn bị để đánh giá sinh viên thực hiện nhiệm vụ học tập (đánh giá chất lượng hoạt động) trong một khóa học ngôn ngữ nhằm giúp sinh viên đạt được cả kiến thức chuyên sâu và các kỹ năng thế kỷ 21. Qua việc phân tích và tổng hợp các tài liệu chuyên ngành, cụ thể là áp dụng đường hướng của Brown (2003), VanTassel-Baska (2013) và Espinosa (2015), cùng sự đúc rút kinh nghiệm nghề nghiệp của bản thân, tác giả đưa ra 4 bước chính của giai đoạn chuẩn bị: (1) xác định chuẩn đầu ra, (2) xây dựng phiếu đánh giá, (3) thiết kế nhiệm vụ để đánh giá thực, và (4) trợ giúp người học. Nghiên cứu chủ yếu sử dụng mô hình của McTighe's (2014) và tháp Bloom để xác định chuẩn đầu ra. Một mô hình khác của McTighe's (2014) được sử dụng để xây dựng phiếu đánh giá. Tác giả mong muốn kết quả nghiên cứu có thể giúp một số giáo viên tiếng Anh tại Việt Nam nâng cao năng lực học tập của sinh viên cả về kiến thức và kỹ năng phục vụ nghề nghiệp tương lai. Nghiên cứu cũng hi vọng đóng góp thêm một nguồn tài liệu tham khảo cho cộng đồng giáo viên trong khu vực.

*Từ khóa:* đánh giá chất lượng hoạt động, khóa học lý thuyết tiếng, chuẩn đầu ra, nhiệm vụ thực, phiếu đánh giá