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Multiple Choice Question Quizzes: Challenges and Solutions for Academic English Language Students Using the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

Abstract. Making better and more effective multiple-choice quizzes (MCQ) is an ongoing challenge for English language instructors. Bloom's taxonomy may be helpful in this regard. Astana IT University (AITU) English language instructors are using Bloom's taxonomy to help create MCQ that test HOTS (higher order thinking skills) and LOTS (lower order thinking skills). This study will analyse the experience of English language instructors at AITU in terms of MCQ quizzes effectiveness, with recommendations for improvement. The main two research questions are:

1) What are the experiences of AITU English instructors in terms of developing MCQ quizzes in view of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy?

2) What are the recommendations of AITU English instructors for improving summative assessment quizzes in view of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy?

Data will be collected using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (MMR). Questions will be categorized as being HOTS or LOTS. Five English language instructors will be interviewed on their experiences with MCQ and assessment and their recommendations for improvement will be collected and discussed. The results of this study will be instrumental for AITU English language instructors in addressing the problems of developing MCQ quizzes to maximize student learning.

Keywords: higher education, MCQ, Bloom's taxonomy, online education, TEFL.

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Introduction

A central challenge for educators is how to create learning programs and teaching methodologies that can provide the best chance for student mastery, not only of information basics and technical skills, but for the development of their critical thinking as well. Creating appropriate testing is a part of this process, and this particular study will focus on how to improve multiple choice questions (MCQ) in

a way that meets the above-stated challenge. Summative decisions may demand investigating the learning tasks, effectiveness of instructional programs, identifying failing students, and, moreover, interpreting test results. But these issues have become a serious challenge when the quality of higher educational contexts requires from the students having a reflective and critical thinking. Students are to be instructed not only to memorize, give back provided information and explain, but to process information, analyze,

evaluate, and create new ideas. Formatting examination questions and setting reasonable parameters is always difficult. Too hard, and students may give up; too easy and students may become bored. This requires from instructors a skill for devising questions that respect the range of student knowledge while allowing for student insight. There are really three moments in an exam process, that may constitute 80% of real time student learning (an average): a) the review process b) the exam and how it gets both students and teachers to think and remember problem sets c) the follow-up, not just a grade, but a full review of all the answers, good, average and 'bad'.

As professionals, we seek to understand the importance of critical thinking and the usage of knowledge at a deeper level. There are a lot of tools to assist in this, and the Revised Bloom's taxonomy (RBT) is one tool to assist in assessing cognitive skills in order to clarify teaching goals, testing and student outcomes [1]. Bloom's taxonomy has had a practical impact on teaching and learning process at different levels of education up since then. Originally Bloom saw his taxonomy as a tool to classify educational objectives, activities and assessments [2]. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) have modified the former classification to make it more useful in terms of cognitive function and emotional behavior. In the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy [3], learning objectives are to be considered from the higher levels of cognitive skills. Learners should focus on deep learning, acquiring knowledge and skills through a variety of tasks and contexts. A new dimension was introduced in the revised taxonomy related to the types of knowledge that a learning activity should address, such as factual, conceptual, procedural and meta-cognitive. This revised taxonomy consists of six levels of cognitive skills starting from lower order thinking skills (LOTS) and ending with higher order thinking skills (HOTS). In the latest version, the following thinking skills were highlighted: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Anderson and Krathwohl's rearrangement took place at several levels with synthesis

(creating) placed higher than evaluation in the original hierarchy. The lowest level of cognition is remembering which helps learners to find out if they gained some insights into the lesson or topic and retrieve the memorized information. Understanding is the level where students make sense of the idea, explain and interpret facts they have learned. Moving to the next level, applying requires learners to use information in a new way, but to follow suit, use the knowledge during the lesson for solving problems. Analyzing is a higher level where students take information apart, explore understanding and relationships and go beyond to see if they can analyze the problem. At the evaluating level students are asked to critically examine and make judgements, assess the information learned, make conclusions, and justify their decision or stance. At the highest level of instructional outcome creating is supposed to reorganize elements by learners to produce or create something new and coherent. As the learning process includes acquisition of new skills, cognitive domain focuses on development of mental abilities and skills through recognizing data and concepts. LOTS are attributed to the information retaining and recalling, understanding and applying. HOTS refer to the thinking and processing skills: analysis, evaluation and synthesis.

In her research, Johansson (2020) found that the English courses taught at Swedish universities do include the common use of HOTS e-assessment tasks more than LOTS, however, there was a difference in the HOTS tasks in some linguistics and literature modules [4]. Koksal et al.'s (2018) study states that the analysis of four language skills' assessing questions revealed only lower cognitive levels of knowledge with no traces of higher order thinking levels [5]. Retnawati et al.'s (2018) analysis of teacher interview responses and test data give the idea that teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of HOTS assessments, ability how to improve and measure student HOTS may have its implications for the learner achievement [6]. Therefore, instructors should be motivated to provide extended information about higher order thinking and to employ HOTS in composing testing. The

research by Soleimani (2016) demonstrates that in MA programs in testing classroom activities lower order thinking skills and medium thinking skills were predominantly used, while higher order thinking skills were never used [7]. On the other hand, PhD programs showed more applied medium order thinking skills than higher order thinking skills, while lower order thinking skills were never used.

For higher order thinking skills to be developed, learners still need the foundation of the essential part of lower order thinking skills [8]. Although LOTS are easier to teach, test and measure, the knowledge gained through higher order thinking is more likely to be applied in solving problems in different contexts. As testing is one of the measurement instruments to evaluate student performance, making a good assessment should incorporate all six cognitive process levels. Multiple choice questions (MCQs) are used for assessment purposes and are easy to administer and score [9]. On top of that, being easy to grade on the LMS Moodle, the latter is considered a practical tool. At Astana IT University (AITU), instructors with about 70 students per trimester prefer MCQ quizzes on Moodle since they are convenient and take no time to grade and give feedback with results immediately after the student submission. In the same vein, as Lenchuk and Ahmed (2021) emphasize, well-developed MCQs are highly reliable in grading since low writing proficiency does not hinder a learner's ability to select the correct answer [9]. As aforementioned, with feedback provided right after the test completion, MCQs have a positive washback on teaching and learning. Likewise, Scully (2017) argues that the advantages of MCQ quizzes provide access to all the levels of Bloom's taxonomy except for creativity [10]. To expand on this, MCQs might facilitate cognitive processes by requiring students to elicit conclusions considering the given instructions, scenarios, or tasks. Learner ability to act in new situations and problem-solving skills can be assessed with the assistance of MCQs. Evaluation, application, and making inferences are foundations of critical thinking. Consequently, the quality of education should increase, and trained learners should be

able to adjust in the competitive and globalized environment.

Sometimes researchers assume that summative tests are mostly focused on knowledge, comprehension and application abilities, even if some question items are related to analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Such tests may pose difficulty for learners. This situation may require the instructors to be responsible for constructing the tests to review the assessment methods and test construction with respect to LOTS or HOTS questions. Additionally, creating MCQ quiz banks on LMS Moodle can be challenging (Javaeed, 2018, as cited in Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2021) [9]. Javaeed (2018, as cited in Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2021) claims the limited amount of cognitive processes (LOTS mainly) that can be assessed with MCQ, defining the latter "pseudo-assessment" since they cannot assess HOTS [9]. Lenchuk and Ahmed (2021) state choosing the best possible answer does not comprise answering an open-ended question; thus, it impedes the ability to think critically [9]. As a result, MCQs focus on assessing the surface knowledge. Therefore, referring to the abovementioned literature review, the purpose of the present study is to raise the awareness of whether higher order thinking skills in MCQ quizzes are employed within the English for Academic Purposes course at AITU. Accordingly, our research questions are:

- 1) What are the experiences of AITU English instructors in terms of developing MCQ quizzes considering the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy?
- 2) What are the recommendations of AITU English instructors for improving summative assessment quizzes considering the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy?

Methodology

In the following section the research methodology used to answer the research questions – the research approach, a description of primary data collection process, data analysis techniques used, and limitations are written. To answer the research questions, research data was collected following the quantitative and qualitative approaches; making it mixed-method

research [11]. The research site is Astana IT University, a higher education institution in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan founded in September 2019. In the 2021-2022 academic year, the university has around 1500 first-year undergraduate students who were taking the course of English for Academic Purposes from September to November (Trimester 1). This site was chosen for research for the purpose of improving the summative assessment practice of the English language program instructors, specifically addressing the issues with developing MCQ Moodle quizzes in relation to the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and their effectiveness.

For the purpose of this study, summative assessment quizzes used in the 1st Trimester (2021-22), English for Academic Purposes course at AITU, are studied. The aim is to classify the quiz question bank according to the thinking levels in line with the Revised Bloom's taxonomy [3]. In order to do that, a quantitative content analysis of all MCQs is conducted. The mentioned method is considered suitable for this study as the method aims at classifying information systematically in order to draw conclusions about the content [12]. In order to go into depth while identifying the MCQs – in terms of the cognitive thinking level extent of the questions, we apply a content analysis method through collecting, listing, and analyzing the questions according to lower order thinking skills: knowledge, comprehension, and application, and higher order thinking skills: analysis, evaluation, and synthesis as they are classified in the Revised Bloom's taxonomy. In order to make the data more manageable, we present the data in tables. In each table, we supplied raw frequencies, as well as the percentage, and number of question items of each cognitive step. To sum up, we employ the Revised Bloom's taxonomy as the theoretical framework of the study and tabulate the findings accordingly. The answers to MCQs of 306 undergraduate students with B2 level from different specialties of AITU have been analyzed.

The course is made up of four summative assessments (mid-term score test worth of 10% and research project part 1-2 defence-20%; and end-term score test worth of 10% and research

project part 3-4 defence -20%) and final exam 40%. The mid-term and end-term tests are thirty-minute long and administered in Week 5 and Week 10 of the course covering materials related to the course content presented in the first five- and the next five-week sessions. The test is consisted of 75 four-option and 3 two-option MCQs. The test is drafted and proofread by language instructors (one native speaker and non-native speaker instructors). The mid-term test items (78) include the content corresponding to several topics: academic integrity (17 questions); giving presentations (11); features of academic articles (4); textbook vocabulary (46). The end-term items (77) cover the content related to the following topics: APA style (20 questions); hedging language (24); persuasive language (6); giving presentations (10); signposting (3); textbook vocabulary (14). To analyse the Trimester 1 quizzes, 4 instructors have shared their students' mid-term and end-term results.

Furthermore, through a qualitative research method, quiz development issues and recommendations for improving summative assessment were illuminated by the means of autobiographical narrative inquiry analysis, which allows to gain deeper insight of language instructors' experience. Through this method, five English instructors shared their stories. The five narrators used the research questions to shape their writing about their experiences and recommendations regarding summative assessment experiences they had in the first trimester. For the data collected through autobiographical narrative inquiry, the platform called Taguette was used to code using the survey questions as tags.

Results

The results of this study are given in two sections, namely, findings and discussion. The findings are organized according to the question analysis, and the questions that were used to write the autobiographical narratives.

The test item classification was analyzed based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and revealed three out of six levels of cognition. The

three levels were remembering, understanding, and applying. The two tests had overall 155 items in which 51% categorized in remembering, 44% categorized in understanding and 5% in analyzing, which correspond to the lowest level of cognition with 100%. In the tests remembering and understanding levels were dominant compared to the applying level. Specifically, in the low cognition level fall the following categories like remembering with 78 items (51%); understanding with 69 items (44%). The applying category has shown only 8 items comprising 5% of the same cognitive level. Meanwhile, no item was found for analyzing, evaluating and creating which is the highest cognitive level. These results may have a positive washback effect to the language assessment classes, though the findings indicate the limited range of cognitive processes (remembering, understanding, and applying) in which learners may find knowledge memorization and reproduction acceptable and discourage them to introduce new patterns of in-depth content learning.

The study findings determine average performance on the MCQ questions where the test required merely retrieving from memory, knowledge interpretation and transferring it in other situations. The overall average percentage of students with correct answers on the MCQ quizzes during the mid-term and end-term period demonstrated satisfactory results in remembering category as 52.32% and 68%, respectively; in understanding category there was 47% and 66%, accordingly; in the applying level with 76% and 69% each. Thus, the study showed students are easily fulfilling tasks requiring memorizing with 60% performance. In the level of understanding students showed poor results (56,5%) where knowledge was required to be interpreted, explained, classified and inferred. Alternatively, the student performance in the application level shows positive outcome with 72% performance in using knowledge for different situations.

Moving now to report on the autobiographical narratives. This section is divided into the questions the narrators have addressed.

1. *What cognitive process levels and knowledge types in the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy were measured*

in summative quizzes for the Trimester 1 (2021-22) English course at AITU?

According to the narrators, remembering and understanding categories were prevalent in all quizzes for Trimester 1 both mid- and end-term. As for HOTS, Respondent 1, Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 point out the applying level to be measured as well.

2. *To what extent do the MCQ quizzes for the Trimester 1 (2021-22) English course at AITU cover the higher order cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy, in your view?*

As the biographical narratives state, less than half of all MCQ quizzes covered higher order thinking skills. Respondent 1 has specified their answer, saying less than 30%. In contrast, Respondent 4 has answered that questions with HOTS are hardly tracked. Respondent 2 has shared her concern saying the instructors had limited time to devise effective question banks, as well as test developers not being qualified enough.

3. *To what extent were the MCQ quizzes for the Trimester 1 (2021-22) English course at AITU effective to assess the higher order thinking skills of the Revised Bloom's taxonomy, in your view?*

Most respondents emphasized administering MCQ as being convenient. On top of that, Respondent 4 has highlighted the reasons to cover lower order thinking skills within MCQ: "easy to develop, less time consuming, higher student concentration". In the same vein, Respondent 3 considers MCQs not being effective to measure student knowledge. Respondent 2 has pointed out that quiz items were never tested in terms of "the Revised Bloom's taxonomy, reliability and validity". Respondent 2 has also stated that instructors aimed at making questions employing some analysis and evaluation; however, they are not always as effective as they should be.

4. *What is the proportion of HOTS and LOTS questions to effectively acquire language skills within English for Academic Purposes at AITU?*

The proportion of HOTS and LOTS in the narrators' points of view should mainly be with HOTS predominant: 75\25 (Respondent 1), 70\30 (Respondent 2), 50\50 (Respondent 3). In contrast,

Respondent 4 deems the perfect balance of HOTS and LOTS is 40\60, respectively. Respondent 5 claims that the optimal outcome should merge both variables with subsequent student follow-up discussions to determine which of either was the most effective.

5. *Have you ever developed MCQ quizzes covering HOTS of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy?*

Developing quizzes with HOTS in mind is what might be challenging. As AITU instructors have highlighted in their narrations, 3 out of 5 have never considered HOTS while developing MCQ quizzes. Respondent 2 has mentioned the importance of the context and experienced some pitfalls along the way. In turn, Respondent 1 has claimed developing MCQ quizzes with HOTS is what she hardly ever does.

6. *What are your recommendations to improve the development of summative quizzes considering the Revised Bloom's taxonomy at AITU?*

Recommendations shared by the narrators can be clustered in the following five categories:

1. MCQ: to incorporate open questions to assess student critical thinking; to refrain from developing only MCQ quizzes; to introduce other types of testing not only MCQs.

2. The Revised Bloom's taxonomy: to include more questions for higher order cognitive levels; to find a balance between the number of HOTS and LOTS questions based on the course aim and objectives; to apply the Revised Bloom's taxonomy verb list to guide students; the summative test should be designed to test acquisition (if the words can be used in different contexts).

3. Test moderation: to regularly check the question banks on reliability, validity, difficulty level and the Revised Bloom's taxonomy; to check for reliability and validity; to start creating questions earlier, especially HOTS ones.

4. Test developers: to hire an experienced specialist; teaching staff training; to allocate a person knowledgeable about test developing issue and responsible for verification of question banks.

5. Student follow-up about MCQ quizzes in terms of HOTS and LOTS.

Discussion

Based on the reflections of the English language program faculty and question analysis, some conclusions can be inferred. First, administering MCQ quizzes is what most narrators found more convenient. Baker and Gravran (2019, as cited in Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2021) emphasized the abovementioned point in their research as well [9]. With respect to MCQ quizzes being practical, there was a general agreement among respondents. Sharing the concern that MCQ quizzes mainly assess LOTS, AITU faculty's opinion aligns with Javeed (2018), and Baker and Gravran (2019, as cited in Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2021), stating that the surface knowledge is what can be assessed with MCQs [9]. On the other hand, the questions analyzed demonstrate the prevalence of LOTS (remembering, understanding), which contradicts the paper of Scully (2017) highlighting the opportunity MCQ quizzes have; specifically, to access to all the levels of Bloom's taxonomy except for creativity [10].

Turning now to summaries, the major recommendations the narrators agree upon are to devise more open-ended questions and incorporate various question types apart from MCQs. Among the recommendations, developing and assessing critical thinking is mentioned as well. Finally, all the instructors agree that some experienced and competent instructors are of need to develop question banks. More teacher staff training is strongly advisable. Finally, student opinion must be included.

In reference to the speculations of Astana IT University's instructors and the test item classification assessment it is worth noting that cognitive processes have been covered in a limited range in line with the Revised Bloom's taxonomy and were classified as remember, apply and analyze. Additionally, there are no items related to higher order thinking skills. Studies of Karamustafaoglu et al. (2003) maintain the same idea that traditional tests constitute questions of lower order cognition [13]. Current results are also consistent with Mohammadi et al.'s (2010) study that also pursued to determine

cognitive process levels measured on the English Language tests in Iran and the findings followed the same suit. Thus, the view of Buckles and Siegfried (2006) suggests that multiple-choice questions are not always appropriate for checking extensive knowledge as HOTS require more creativity and individuality in reasoning which cannot be measured through MCQs [15].

As regards the summative tests, the overall average score is 52 (mid-term test) and 68 (end-term test) out of 100, which is satisfactory or passing grade according to the university grading system. It is well correlated with overall percentage on the tests in terms of cognitive levels where in remembering category it is 52.32% and 68%, respectively; in understanding category there is 47% and 66%, accordingly; in the applying level with 76% and 69% each. The test results prove that at the very beginning students face some difficulties while answering the MCQs that are used to be exposed to questions which check student understanding and remembering while taking current asynchronous task tests in the formative assessment. However, the present situation has shown some improvements in the subsequent end-term test. Instructors' reflections may point out that university instructors generally prefer to check only student knowledge and understanding. This issue has also been reflected in the findings of Azar's study (2005) [16]. Our findings may have some methodological implications for instructors as they imply that learners are likely to fail the higher order thinking questions without even trying. The major worries of faculty members may be attributed to the negative performance of students and test design without considering every step of cognitive

levels, therefore, for this reason some training on measuring and assessing student achievements through the Revised Bloom's taxonomy cognitive levels should be held.

Conclusion

Student quizzes are always a challenge, both to the student and to the examiner or examination team. The findings of this study are similar to what scholars are concluding globally. The faculty members of AITU English Language Program have experienced a range of issues. Looking closely at the findings it is essential for instructors to focus on the quiz design considering the balance of LOTS and HOTS. Despite answering the research questions, the study has certain limitations. In terms of data analysis, 22 out of 155 questions were not scrutinized due to some technical troubles. On top of that, only MCQ quizzes were considered; however, HOTS as well as LOTS are covered during in-class activities. This study could be improved by questioning more instructors, analyzing more student quiz results, and assessing student opinions.

All things considered, the data show that instructors had various experiences with designing MCQ quizzes. The study participants understood the limits that a question type (MCQs) imposes. As the study illuminated the issues related to covering HOTS within MCQ quizzes, the approaches to developing and using testing types may be improved. It is implied that the university administration should pay more attention to quiz development practices by training the instructors and allocating people responsible for designing and testing analysis.

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Бірнеше нұсқалы жауаптары бар тестілер: академиялық ағылшын тілін үйренуші студенттер үшін жаңартылған Блум таксономиясы негізінде туындайтын мәселелер мен шешімдер

Аңдатпа. Бірнеше нұсқалардың ішінен жауапты таңдау тестілеуі оқытушылар арасында қиындық туындайды. Блум таксономиясы бойынша тест жасау көп күш жұмсауды қажет ететінін атап өтуге болады.

Сәйкесінше, ағылшын тілі мұғалімдері тестілердің тиімділігін арттыруда түрлі кедергілерге тап болады. Astana IT University-дің ағылшын тілі мұғалімдері арасында кездесетін негізгі мәселелер негізінен студенттердің жоғары деңгейдегі ойлау қабілеттері мен төменгі деңгейдегі ойлау қабілеттерін ескере отырып, сұрақтарды құрастырумен байланысты. Сондықтан бұл зерттеу жұмысы бірнеше нұсқалардан жауапты таңдау тестін орындау және жақсарту бойынша ұсыныстар тұрғысынан Astana IT University-дің ағылшын тілі пәні мұғалімдерінің тәжірибесін зерттеуге бағытталған. Осыған сәйкес зерттеу жұмысында мынадай мәселелер қозғалады:

1) Astana IT University-дің ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің Блумның қайта қаралған таксономиясын ескере отырып, бірнеше нұсқалардан жауапты таңдау тестілерін құрастыруда тәжірибесі қандай?

2) Блумның қайта қаралған таксономиясын ескере отырып, қорытынды тестілерді жақсарту бойынша Astana IT University-дің ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің ұсыныстары қандай?

Осы зерттеу сұрақтарына жауап беру үшін деректер сапалық және сандық әдістерді қолдана отырып жиналады. Қандай сұрақтар жоғары деңгейдегі ойлау қабілеттері мен төменгі деңгейдегі ойлау қабілет-

тері санатына жататындығын анықтау үшін сұрақтарға талдау жүргізіледі; өмірбаяндық талдау арқылы бес ағылшын тілі пәні мұғалімінің тәжірибесіне тоқталады. Оқытудың тиімділігін арттыру үшін бірнеше нұсқалардан жауапты таңдау тестілерін құрастыру кезіндегі қиындықтарды шешуде бұл зерттеудің нәтижелері Astana IT University-дің ағылшын тілі пәні мұғалімдері үшін пайдалы болады.

Түйін сөздер: жоғары білім, бірнеше нұсқалардан жауапты таңдау тестілері, Блум таксономиясы, онлайн білім, TEFL

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**Тесты множественного выбора: проблемы и решения
по принципам обновленной таксономии Блума для студентов,
изучающих академический английский язык.**

Аннотация. Тесты множественного выбора бросают вызов педагогам. Можно отметить, что разработка тестов по таксономии Блума требует больших усилий. Учитывая это, преподаватели английского языка сталкиваются с различными препятствиями, связанными с обеспечением эффективности тестов. Основные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются преподаватели английского языка АІТУ, могут быть связаны с созданием вопросов учитывая НМВУ (навыки мышления высокого уровня) и НМНУ (навыки мышления низкого уровня). Таким образом, это исследование направлено на изучение опыта преподавателей английского языка в АІТУ с точки зрения эффективности теста с несколькими вариантами ответов и рекомендаций по их совершенствованию. Соответственно, вопросы исследования, следующие:

1) Каков опыт преподавателей английского языка АІТУ в разработке тестов с несколькими вариантами с учетом пересмотренной таксономии Блума?

2) Каковы рекомендации преподавателей английского языка АІТУ по улучшению итоговых тестов с учетом пересмотренной таксономии Блума?

Чтобы ответить на эти исследовательские вопросы, данные будут собираться с использованием как качественных, так и количественных подходов. Будет проведен анализ вопросов, чтобы выяснить, какие вопросы относятся к категории НМВУ или НМНУ; будут освещены посредством автобиографического повествовательного анализа опыта пяти преподавателей английского языка. Результаты этого исследования будут полезны для преподавателей английского языка АІТУ при решении проблем разработки тестов с несколькими вариантами ответов для повышения эффективности обучения.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, тесты множественного выбора, таксономия Блума, онлайн-образование, TEFL.

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