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## **PREPARATORY TRAINING OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: ORGANIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS IN A COMPLEX OF CONTINUOUS EDUCATION**

Testing is far from being an emerging trend in education; the use of tests can boast a long history both on the global educational scale and in particular educational institutions. In the recent years, the growth in testing has been parallel with the development of sophisticated computer hardware and software shifting from conventional Computer-Based Testing (CBT) to Computerized Adaptive Testing (CAT) and online testing which offer new possibilities for both learners and educators.

Various testing means have always been in the focus of attention at Kharkiv University of Humanities “People’s Ukrainian Academy”. Being a complex of continuous education, “PUA” is persistently implementing reasonable testing at all of its educational levels from Specialized Economics and Law School (SELS) to Continuing Education Department in order to meet daily instructional needs in various academic subjects [1, pp. 169 -189; 2, pp. 97-107] and activate students’ potential and skills for an independent search [3, pp. 281-298].

The use of CBT and online testing programmes has multiple benefits for both students and teachers in terms of instruction, assessment and administration. Some of the ‘tangible’ benefits would include testing tasks that are personalized and tailored to individual students’ needs; immediate grading allows the instructor to reallocate time and focus on personalized feedback – written, voice or video-based – which is absolutely critical for learning, though time consuming; with inclusive teaching and learning, online testing programmes and various apps can facilitate the learning process of variously challenged students or simply allow more time for slow-paced learners. Enhancing motivation of students to both teaching and learning or eliciting/further developing students’ creating potential through incorporating other types of technologies would be just a few of the ‘intangible’ benefits of using testing in current educational environment [4, pp. 129-131].

Although the use of CBT, CAT and online testing has traditionally been considered the prerogative of higher education, the latest developments in secondary education coupled with the imposition of COVID-19 quarantine have paved the way for practical and effective use of testing in secondary schools. As exemplified by “PUA”, it is possible to demonstrate that testing has proved an effective tool of preparing senior high school students for taking Independent External Evaluation (IEE).

At “PUA” EIT preparatory testing routinely takes place at two stages: firstly, at the senior grades of SELS; secondly, at the Department of Pre-University Training. Both branches of pre-university training at “PUA” constitute an integral part of a complex system of continuing education, which ensure high-quality IEE preparatory training, the readiness of applicants for further education at higher educational institutions and pre-professional training to meet the educational and professional needs of senior high school students [5, pp. 96-98].

Among all the methods and approaches used at these two stages, testing requires special attention. To begin with, it serves a number of practical purposes:

- ensures better understanding of the IEE format and testing methods;
- develops exam coping strategies;
- increases knowledge in a certain academic subject to a level, necessary for successful completion of the exam;
- helps pinpoint areas for improvement;
- mitigates such stress factors as test anxiety which can influence students’ performance;
- drawing from a back-end database of test items, provides a wider variety of test items than any paper-based test or a test preparatory textbook.

Another benefit of the testing method worth noting is a variety of assessment approaches. Vertically aligned assessment allows testing core knowledge in a particular area but at various levels of difficulty (criterion-based testing). Horizontally aligned assessment makes it possible for the instructor to compare the performance of the learners in a certain group against one another (norm-referenced testing).

The inherent property of testing systems – value-added growth measurement – is a useful means of tracking and measuring the learner’s individual growth over a certain period of time and benchmarking their position during and at the end of the training period based on the entry test results.

The majority of present-day educators believe that standardized testing can benefit students; the testing approach is not devoid of drawbacks, though. One of the main cons of the testing system is the assumption that “teaching to the test” may stop instructors from trying new teaching methods and techniques in the classroom. Another assumption that is after the heart of most parents is that test scores do not provide a true picture of the student’s ability and academic progress since they are equally likely to result from a lack of knowledge about the subject or a problem with taking the standardized test.

However, notwithstanding the pros and cons of standardized test, they are here to stay and be extensively used both in the classroom and as a means of external assessment. In the experience of “PUA”, mitigating the testing system drawbacks and putting its advantages to good use make tests a powerful tool of senior high school students’ preparation for IEE in any subject.

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