3.4 Achievement tests

Apart from a progress test the teachers employ another type – achievement test. According to Longman Dictionary of LTAL (3), an achievement test is a test, which measures a language someone has learned during a specific course, study or program. Here the progress is significant and, therefore, is the main point tested.

Alderson (1996:219) posits that achievement tests are "more formal", whereas Hughes (1989:8) assumes that this type of tests will fully involve teachers, for they will be responsible for the preparation of such tests and giving them to the learners. He repeats the dictionary defining the notion of achievement tests, adding just that success of the students, groups of students, or the courses.

Furthermore, Alderson (ibid.) conceives that achievement tests are mainly given at definite times of the school year. Moreover, they could be extremely crucial for the students, for they are intended either to make the students pass or fail the test.

At this instant the author of the paper is determined to compare a progress and achievement test. Again if we look at these two types they might seem similar, however, it is not so. Drawing on the facts listed above (see sub-chapter 2.3) we can report that a progress test is typically used during the course to check the acquisition of an excerpted material. An achievement test checks the acquisition of the material, as well. Although, it is far different in its application time. We basically use an achievement test at the end of the course to check the acquisition of the material covered during the study year, not bits of it as it is with a progress test.

Quoting Hughes (ibid.) we can differentiate between two kinds of achievement tests: final and progress tests. Final tests are the tests that are usually given at the end of the course in order to check the students' achieved results and whether the objectives set at the beginning have been successfully reached. Further Hughes highlights that ministries of education, official examining boards, school administration and even the teachers themselves design these tests. The tests are based on the curriculum and the course that has been studied. We assume, that is a well-known fact that teachers usually are responsible for composing such tests, and it requires a careful work.

Alternatively, Alderson (ibid.) mentions two usage types of achievement tests: *formative* and *summative*. The notion of a formative test denotes the idea that the teacher will be able after evaluating the results of the test reconsider his/her teaching, syllabus design and even slow down the pace of studying to consolidate the material if it is necessary in future. Notwithstanding, these reconsiderations will not affect the present students who have taken the test. They will be applied to the future syllabus design.

Summative usage will deal precisely with the students' success or failure. The teacher will immediately can take up remedial activities to improve a situation.

Further, Alderson (ibid.) and Heaton (1990:14) stipulate that designing an achievement test is rather time-consuming, for the achievement test is basically devised to cover a broad topic of the material covered during the course. In addition, one and the same achievement test could be given to more than one class at school to check both the students' progress and the teachers' work. At that point it is very essential to consider the material covered by different classes or groups. You cannot ask the students what they have not been taught. Heaton (ibid.) emphasises the close cooperative work of the teachers as a crucial element in test design. However, in the school the author of the paper used to work the teachers did not cooperate in designing achievement tests. Each teacher was free to write the test that best suits his/her children.

Developing the topic, we can focus on Hughes' idea that there is an approach how to design a test; it is called *syllabus-content approach* . The test is based on a syllabus studied or a book taken during the course. This test could be described as a fair test, for it focuses mainly on the detailed material that the students are supposed to have studied. Hughes (ibid.) points out that if the test is inappropriately designed, it could result in unsuccessful accomplishment of it. Sometimes the demands of the test may differ from the objectives of the course. Therefore, the test should be based directly on the objectives of the course. Consequently, it will influence the choice of books appropriate to the syllable and syllable itself. The backwash will be positive not only for the test, but also for the teaching. Furthermore, we should mention that the students have to know the criteria according to which they are going to be evaluated.

To conclude we shall state again that achievement tests are meant to check the mastery of the material covered by the learners. They will be great helpers for the teacher's future work and will contribute a lot to the students' progress.

3.5 Proficiency tests

The last type of test to be discussed is a proficiency test. Regarding Longman Dictionary of LTAL (292) proficiency test is a test, which measures how much of a language a person knows or has learnt. It is not bound to any curriculum or syllabus, but is intended to check the learners' language competence. Although, some preparation and administration was done before taking the test, the test's results are what being focused on. The examples of such tests could be the American Testing of English as Foreign Language test (further in the text TOEFL) that is used to measures the learners' general knowledge of English in order to allow them to enter any high educational establishments or to take up a job in the USA. Another proficiency test is Cambridge First Certificate test that has almost the same aim as TOEFL.

Hughes (1989:10) gives the similar definition of proficiency tests stressing that training is not the thing that is emphasised, but the language. He adds that 'proficient' in the case of proficiency tests means possessing a certain ability of using the language according to an appropriate purpose. It denotes that the learner's language ability could be tested in various fields or subjects (art, science, medicine, etc.) in order to check whether the learner could suit the demands of a specific field or not. This could refer to TOEFL tests. Apart from TOEFL we can speak about Cambridge First Certificate test, which is general and does not concern any specific field. The aim of this test is to reveal whether the learners' language abilities have reached a certain standard set. The test could be taken by anyone who is interested in testing the level of language knowledge. There are special tests levels, which can be chosen by a candidate. If a candidate has passed the exam s/he can take another one of a different level. However, these entire tests are not free of charge, and in order to take it an individual has to pay for them.

Regarding Hughes (ibid.) who supposes that the only similar factor about such tests that they are not based on any courses, but are intended to measure the candidates' suitability for a certain post or course at the

university, we can add that in order to pass these tests a candidate has to attend special preparatory courses.

Moreover, Hughes (ibid.) believes that the proficiency tests affect learners' more in negative way, than in positive one.

The author of the paper both agrees and does not agree with the Hughes' proposed statement. Definitely, this test could make the testee depressed and exhausted by taking a rather long test. Moreover, the proficiency tests are rather impartial; they are not testee-friendly.

However, there is a useful factor amongst the negative ones. It is preparation to proficiency tests, for it involves all language material starting from grammar finishing with listening comprehension. All four skills are being practised during the preparation course; various reading task and activities have been incorporated; writing has been stressed focusing on all possible types of essays, letters, reviews, etc. Speaking has been practiced as well. The whole material has been consolidated for many times.

To summarize we can claim that there are different types of tests that serve for different purposes. Moreover, they all are necessary for the teacher's work, for them, apart from a proficiency test, could contribute to successful material acquisition by learners.