

EVALUATION OF THE EALTA INAUGURAL CONFERENCE

Kranjska Gora, Slovenia 14.05. – 16.05.2004

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1. Data collection

This report gives an account of the results of a feedback questionnaire (see Appendix) mailed to the participants via e-mail shortly after the conference. The participants were given a week to respond. Some addresses had errors and the messages bounced. No further effort was made to contact these participants.

2. Data

The list of participants has 205 names out of which 60 are Slovenian. The participants came from 25 countries. Altogether 53 responses were received from 18 countries. Most respondents answered all the questions. Due to some missing data, the frequencies do not, however, always add up to the total expected.

If we take into account the fact that the Slovenian participants accounted for 30% of all participants and that only a few of them filled in the questionnaire, about one third of the non-Slovenian participants responded to the questionnaire. All categories of participants are represented: language teachers, language testing professionals and administrators. Thus the results can be regarded as sufficiently informative. The fact that the responses are quite consistent adds support to this conclusion.

The data were analysed using SPSS.

3. Results

The results on the fixed option questions are presented in a table on the following page. They are broken down by category of participants: languages teachers (N= 20), language testing professionals (N= 27), administrators (N=3), other (N=3).

The results are reported by presenting the frequencies concerning the options chosen by the participants. In the Total column the frequencies are supplemented by percentages. Testing of significance between the groups was not considered meaningful. There were only minor differences between the groups.

		Language teacher (N= 20)	Lang. testing professional (N= 27)	Administrator (N= 3)	Other (N=3)	Total (N= 53)	
						N	%
Organisation	Very good	19	25	2	2	48	90.6
	Good	1	2	1	1	5	9.4
	Not so good	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cost	Very reasonable	5	14	12	1	21	39.6
	Reasonable	13	10	8	2	27	50.9
	Expensive	-	3	2	-	3	5.7
	Too expensive	1	-	-	-	1	1.9
Locality	Very good	15	17	2	2	36	67.9
	Good	5	10	1	1	17	32.1
	Not so good	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-

		Language teacher (N= 20)	Lang. testing professional (N= 27)	Administrator (N= 3)	Other (N=3)	Total (N= 53)	
						N	%
Length of conference	Too long	-	1	-	1	2	3.8
	Quite long	6	6	2	1	15	28.3
	Suitable	12	18	1	1	32	60.4
	Quite short	2	2	-	-	4	7.5
	Too short	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of presentations	Much too many	-	4	1	-	11	20.8
	Too many	5	-	-	1	11	20.8
	Suitable	9	17	1	1	28	52.8
	Too few	6	6	1	1	14	26.4
	Much too few	-	-	-	-	14	26.4
Length of presentations	Too long	-	4	1	-	5	9.4
	Quite long	9	10	2	2	23	43.4
	Suitable	8	10	-	1	19	35.8
	Quite short	3	2	-	-	5	9.4
	Too short	-	1	-	-	1	1.9
Quality of presentations	Good	7	13	1	1	22	41.5
	Mostly good	12	14	2	2	30	56.6
	Mostly poor	1	-	-	-	1	1.9
	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-
Opportunity for participation and discussion	Too much	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Much	2	5	1	-	8	15.1
	Little	14	11	-	2	27	50.9
	Too little	3	10	2	1	16	30.2
Panel discussion	Very interesting	11	6	1	2	20	37.7
	Interesting	7	16	-	1	24	45.3
	Not interesting	1	6	2	-	8	15.1
	Waste of time	1	-	-	-	1	1.9
Opportunity to learn	Very much	4	12	1	-	18	34.0
	Quite a lot	14	11	1	2	28	52.8
	Not so much	2	4	1	-	7	13.2
	Very little	-	-	-	-	-	-
Annual General Meeting	Very effective	2	5	2	1	8	15.1
	Effective	16	18	-	2	38	71.7
	Ineffective	-	3	-	-	3	5.7
	Very ineffective	-	-	-	-	-	-
If the money were not a problem, would you attend the next annual meeting?	Definitely yes	14	17	2	3	36	67.9
	Probably yes	5	4	-	-	9	17.0
	Probably not	1	-	-	-	1	1.9
	Definitely not	-	-	-	-	-	-

The results can be summarized in a straightforward manner:

- 1) The organization of the conference was considered very good.
- 2) The cost was found reasonable or very reasonable.
- 3) The venue was also considered very good.
- 4) The length of the conference was considered mostly suitable or a bit on the long side.
- 5) The length of the presentations was found by half of the participants to be too long but one third thought them to have been of appropriate length.
- 6) Half of the participants thought that the number of presentations was suitable and one quarter found them to be either too many or too few.
- 7) The participants were satisfied with the quality of the presentations.
- 8) By contrast, the opportunities for participation and discussion were found to be too few.
- 9) The panel discussion was found mostly interesting.
- 10) By far the most participants had felt that they learned quite a lot or very much during the conference.
- 11) The Annual General Meeting was regarded as having been run effectively.
- 12) Almost all of the participants were willing to attend the next conference if the money were not a problem.

Next, some of the comments written by the participants are cited. There were particularly many reports on what the participants had learned and many suggestions were made for the next conference.

The comments were chosen so that they give a good picture of the range of comments and provide as much concrete suggestions as possible.

It is very obvious that the comments provide very useful suggestions that can be utilised in planning the next conference and EALTA programme of activities in general.

Organisation

- Excellent job.
- Big hugs to Karmen and her whole team.
- Big thanks to the organizers.
- Many thanks for setting this organisation up, and for the successful conference.

Cost

- No registration fee and luxury accommodation was a perfect combination.
- Private accommodation should also be offered as a choice. It is surely lower price.

Locality

- Wonderful location.
- Thanks for the sunshine

Length of conference

- Very reasonable, just the right length.
- One more day for discussions would have been useful, I think.

Length of presentations

- More space for discussion.
- Some presentations seemed OK while others were a bit too long but all this depends on the interests and needs of the respective participants.

Number of presentations

- Number of presentations was fine.
- Perhaps more time for discussion in special interest group(s) would be great.

Quality of presentations

- Some of them were perfect.
- It has to be remembered that this was a first event: from this point of view I feel EALTA got off to a good start. One presentation veered towards the commercial and one (but only one) was sadly ill-prepared and ill-presented.
- For people with less experience some lectures were maybe a bit too scientific. They were also not descriptive enough, maybe due to the lack of time – many issues were only mentioned and supposed to be generally understood. But it gave us or at least me a lot of food for thought.

Opportunity for participation and discussion

- I would have preferred longer discussion time – but that is a reflection on the quality of the presentations
- Maybe a bit more time in the afternoon in smaller groups?
- This for me was the weak point. The atmosphere was not that supportive for those outside of the clique sitting towards the front.

Panel discussion

- More time would have been helpful.
- More time needed for further discussion of topics arisen.
- The chair shouldn't answer all the questions.
- Some answers could have been more concise – and some questions more precise!
- Very well moderated, well done John De Jong.

Opportunity to learn

- More presentations like the ones on the Dutch CEF Construct Group, Dialang, or the manual (aims and procedures).
- Could learn about how people think about and work in relation to the CEF in Europe today. There are also many other interesting issues to discuss and learn about.
- Good, high level stuff, very useful for those trying to figure out their systems with regard to CEF.

What in particular did you learn at this conference?

- European levels
- Need to come together
- How thoroughly the test should be prepared (Norway presentation)
- That the methods of examiner training (and some problems) are similar in different countries (Hungarian presentation)
- Possibilities how to relate CEF to other tests.
- I learned more about the CEF thanks to objective analyses given by authors and expert.
- I realised the importance of relating language exams and faced the complexity of this task.
- I value the opportunity of meeting people from all over Europe interested in testing.
- Got a deeper insight into the CEF.
- The ENLTA Survey analysis was very informative for me
- The complexity of view held on the CEF, the complexity of different educational systems in Europe.
- I learned useful information from the overview of experiences in testing
- I received hints for my testing work and, above all, someone gave voice to my doubts.
- That teachers do not pay enough attention to assessment and testing, and that we/they are not qualified to do it properly.
- CEFR is not a prescriptive document.
- Good evidence on pitching real exams to CEF.
- My testing dilemmas are not mine only. There are others who also don't know all the answers.
- EALTA might prove as a very useful and helpful testing association.
- Promising attempts to help language testers and assessors to use the CEF in order to make language examinations comparable so that "our B2 could be the same as anybody else's B2".
- The importance and complexity of testing; the importance and value of the Common European Framework of Reference, how it is structured, how it can be used.

- What's going on in the field. What are other people's interests (very limited due to the short duration of panel discussion)

Annual General Meeting

- Effective, but not so much fun as was promised!
- The situation where there is only one candidate for the post brings bad memories back for the people from former communist countries. At least they should have been introduced better to show that they are really suitable.
- On principle, I would like to see greater involvement of the participants during the AGM – some items were presented, or appeared, as fait accompli which was unfortunate – and the views of the AGM could/should be sought more pro-actively, by asking members to vote on given issues (by show of hands): in essence pro-actively addressing the old question of greater accountability and better transparency.

What would you like to suggest for the next annual meeting and conference?

- To orient it a little bit more to the needs of language teachers, not just testing experts.
- Some examples.
- About the research carried out on testing.
- Delegates from each participating country to be given the chance to present developments in their own countries.
- Practical workshops, more discussions besides talks.
- More time for questions and discussion.
- I think it would be wise to have "a theme" for each conference. The theme should be different for each conference. This would make a conference more focused, and hopefully that would make the participants go home feeling they had learnt something.
- A mixture of plenary lectures, presentations on accomplished projects and research, and presentations on on-going research.
- More time for "informal" debate.
- The opportunity of having meetings with people working on similar areas.
- Continue working on standardization.
- Tests of high quality will not always find their way to the systems of education until the authorities of examination centres and ministries of education are sufficiently trained to understand the requirements for good testing and appropriate administration. Poor understanding of the sophistication of test design among the authorities responsible for implementing examinations is quite a problem in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This might be one of the issues for discussion.
- Probably more about creating test specifications; from theory to practice
- It will be very interesting if the association can gather information about European projects and provide the conditions for the creation of work groups that can "use" the conference as a starting point for their activities, and in future meetings, as a follow up of their achievements.

4. Conclusion

The inaugural conference was successful. Most comments given by the participants were positive or even very positive. Also, when voicing concern e.g. concerning the number of presentations and lack of time for discussion, several participants often noted that the nature of the inaugural conference made some problems understandable.

Judging by the many items of learning mentioned by the participants, EALTA is responding to a genuine need in the field. A large number of concrete suggestions were made for the next conference, which will be very helpful in planning the conference in Voss and EALTA's agenda in general.

Appendix

**QUESTIONNAIRE
ABOUT THE EALTA INAUGURAL CONFERENCE**

Dear Colleagues,

This questionnaire is being sent to participants at the EALTA Inaugural Conference in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia (14.05. – 16.05.2004).

It has been prepared to solicit participants' views about the Inaugural Conference. Your answers will be of great help to the ENLTA project in reporting the assessment of the conference. More importantly, the answers will be valuable in the planning of the next EALTA annual meeting and conference.

The answers you provide will be treated confidentially, and results will be reported only for the whole group, and where meaningful, broken down into sub-groups. If quotations are included, they will not be attributed in a way that makes it possible to identify the author.

The questionnaire is short and most questions can be answered by choosing the appropriate option. The last question (E) is open, to give you an opportunity to make any other comments or suggestions concerning the next EALTA annual meeting and annual conference.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation!

Professor Sauli Takala

Returning your questionnaire

Please return your completed questionnaire by **Monday 31st May**

Either:

Complete the questionnaire electronically, and send it to Sauli Takala sjtakala@hotmail.com

(it is recommended that you indicate your responses to multiple choice questions with **bold** or underline)

Or:

Print out the form and send it to:

Sauli Takala

Luokotie 2

40950 Muurame, Finland

Finland

A. Please, evaluate the quality of each of the following aspects of the conference by marking one of the four possible assessment categories:

1 Organisation:

very good | good | not so good | poor

Any other comments?

(Q-A1)

2 Cost:

very reasonable | reasonable | expensive | too expensive

Any other comments?

(Q-A2)

3 Locality:

very good | good | not so good | poor

Any other comments?

(Q-A3)

4 Length of conference:

too long | quite long | quite short | too short

Any other comments?

(Q-A4)

5 Length of presentations:

too long | quite long | quite short | too short

Any other comments?

(Q-A5)

6 Number of presentations:

much too many | too many | too few | much too few

Any other comments?

(Q-A6)

7 Quality of presentations:

good | mostly good | mostly poor | poor

Any other comments?

(Q-A7)

8 Opportunity for participation and discussion:

too much | much | little | too little

Any other comments?

(Q-A8)

9 Panel discussion

very interesting | interesting | not interesting | waste of time

Any other comments?

(Q-A9)

10 Opportunity to learn

very much | quite a lot | not so much | very little

Any other comments?

(Q-A10)

11 Annual General Meeting:

very effective | effective | ineffective | very ineffective

Any other comments?

(Q-A11)

B. Please, read again the above mentioned 11 aspects of the conference and evaluate:

a. Which of the above aspects (1 to 11) was the best of the conference? (circle its number)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

b. Which of the above aspects (1 to 11) was the worst of the conference? (circle its number)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

C. If money were no problem, would you attend the next annual conference?

definitely yes | probably yes | probably not | definitely not

D. What in particular did you learn at this conference?

Q-D

E. What would you like to suggest for the next annual meeting and conference?

Q-E

F. Please indicate whether you are:

language teacher | assessment professional / researcher | educational administrator | other