

Issues and Challenges in the Process of Assessment

Teuta Agaj, PhD Cand.

Public University "KADRI ZEKA" Gjilan, Faculty of Education

Email address: teuta_agaj@live.com

Abstract

Assessment is a broad concept which means it is part of the whole educational process of teaching and learning. The variety of methods that teachers use to evaluate and measure the student's learning progress and skill acquisition are referred by the term assessment. Assessment shapes how teachers teach and how students learn. The assessment of student's achievements is a pedagogical dialogue between teacher-student for the quality of teaching, learning and knowledge. Assessment especially continuous assessment is a very important tool that teachers should use in the classroom because by using it a wealth of information to guide classroom practice and to manage learning and learners can be provided. Assessment tells us the truth about an education system, then about the qualities of students and their work. It has an important role in education and it is necessary to help students learn, to help students become knowledgeable, to help students gain insight into their learning and understanding, to teach effectively etc. Since making assessment an integral part of daily instruction is a challenge, this paper examines the process of assessing student's knowledge, types of assessment and the assessment of L2 writing. It also focuses on the issues and challenges in the process of assessment.

Keywords: assessment, reliability, validity, L2 assessment.

Introduction

Assessing students' knowledge has a great pedagogical and social importance because through it we conclude how and in what way the purpose and the educational duties are built in a school, at what level the knowledge of students is increased, discover our weaknesses on a professional and on a methodical aspect, meanwhile overcoming our weaknesses at work as well.

Assessment of students' knowledge is one of the most difficult and serious activities for teachers in the teaching process. It is a process in which the teacher is tested for his/her attitude in assessment. During the learning process, assessment is done to give conclusions about the achievements of students, their progress and also to improve the learning experiences and outcomes of students.

The teacher must not use the grade to keep the class under control, on the contrary the grade should be an incentive educational tool and assessment must be objective, reasonable, public and with relevant arguments.

The process of assessing students' knowledge

Assessment is a very delicate and very complicated process during which accurate information must be provided about what we want to assess (Zeneli, 2003).

According to Musai, 2002 assessment has to do with any kind of activity and instrument used to judge students' achievement. It is necessary for different purposes such as: to provide information about students' progress, to provide students with educational information, to motivate students, to mark the progress of students, to ensure the realization of the actual objectives, to assess students' readiness for future learning etc.

There are many techniques, instruments and procedures to carry out the measurement and assessment, among them special place occupy tests. The test consists of a system of tasks, questions, logically related issues, which relate to a particular area and which should be resolved and on the basis of those solutions the level and degree of certain occurrence is assessed (Salihu, Zabeli, Hoti, 2006).

Assessment should be viewed as a process of determining the nature and extent of learning in the development process of the student. According to Zeneli, 2003 assessment will be more effective if we apply these principles:

1. Defining the scope and priorities in the assessment process
2. Choosing appropriate assessment techniques consistent with the characteristics which need to be measured
3. Application of different assessment techniques
4. The weaknesses of assessment techniques
5. Assessment is a mean to an end, but not the end itself.

Two key terms in any assessment discussion are: reliability and validity.

By reliability is meant the stability of test scores which means they should be replicable, for example, from one test occasion to another or from one essay prompt to another. A test can not measure anything well unless it measures consistently. To have confidence in a measuring instrument, we would need to be assured that approximately the same results would be obtained. Nevertheless there are some problems with the expectation of reliability, the same person does not necessarily write equally well on different days or about different subject matter and teachers also are likely to vary from day to day, from subject to subject, they are likely to have preferences for certain kinds of ideas or structures or dislike for some choices of words or arguments.

By validity is meant that the test is based upon a proper analysis of the skill or skills we wish to measure and that the test scores correlate highly with actual ability in the skills area being tested. According to Hamp-Lyons, 1990 in Kroll, 2003 there are four kinds of validity: face validity- means that both the teacher and the student believe that the test measures what it claims to measure; content validity- means that the test measures a specific skill or the content of a particular course of study; criterion validity- means the measurable relationship between a particular test of writing and various other measures; and construct validity- means the arguments for including direct performances in any assessment.

Types of assessment

Teachers at all levels of education except the use of the dominant type of assessment such as summative assessment should also practice diagnostic and formative assessment in assessing student's knowledge and achievements since they enable the creation of various functions to achieve the goals in the process of assessment (Osmani, 2008).Types of assessment are:

Standardized assessment: assesses students at a particular grade level who are required to take the same test;

Alternative assessment – assesses students' understanding of the material;

Diagnostic assessment – assesses what students already know about a topic, it means their current knowledge of a subject;

Formative assessment – assesses student's progress throughout the process of learning, it means while learning is taking place;

Summative assessment – assesses students at the end of the year or semester, it means after the learning has been completed.

However, besides assessment, the teacher should also use other means to motivate students to achieve results such as: encouragement, the success experience, gratitude, promise, praise, reward, gift, racing etc.

Assessment of L2 writing

Assessing the writing skills involves having students write about a topic which provides information on student's progress and weaknesses. Assessment is an integral part of the curriculum and it should reflect the objectives of a course. Many

teachers think that their job is to teach well, that the assessment is not their concern and that it should be done by a special person who is responsible for testing.

However if teachers want to ensure that those they teach will be judged fairly, they must have some involvement with evaluation. When teacher plan writing tests, they should be aware of a variety of situations they are going to face: take part in a school-wide writing assessment, participate in decisions about what writing test to use for a specific purpose and talk to parents about the meaning and implications of tests their children are taking.

Scoring procedures for writing assessments are: Holistic, Analytic, primary trait scoring and multiple trait scoring.

Holistic scoring assesses the overall competence of a piece of writing but it neither diagnoses problems nor prescribes remedies for the writing.

Analytic scoring separates various factors and skills and so can be used by teachers and students to diagnose writing strengths and weaknesses. It assesses content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics (sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary and so forth).

As a teacher I did analytic assessment with students of fourth and fifth grade. For content, the students had a theme they had to write about, like about fathers. Their particular theme was their own choice. We did the exercises in the book to build and activate background knowledge, and to give them ideas. Then we worked on the theme. After that, they wrote their essays. I paid attention to organization of ideas and whether what they wrote was relevant to their theme. My individual assessment of vocabulary, language use, grammar, etc. depended on the student, level, and where we were in the semester. For the first draft, I might just underline what needed to be fixed and use a symbol to indicate what the problem was, like "W" for word choice. When I didn't think they could figure out, I told them on the first draft. I made more corrections on the 2nd drafts, and by the time they wrote the 3rd drafts, the essays were good.

According to Lloyd-Jones, 1977 and Mullen, 1980 in Kroll, 2003 primary trait scoring involves deciding which one aspect of writing is the key to success on this task, developing a highly detailed set of descriptors for performance on that aspect and training teachers in its use.

Multiple trait scoring treats the construct of writing as complex and multifaceted, it allows teachers to identify the qualities of writing that are important in a particular context or task and to evaluate writing according to the salient traits in a specific context.

Personally, as a teacher I give tests over the material we had studied. When I taught in a secondary school, the department gave my students an evaluation form to fill out about my teaching. Then, the principal often came into the room and evaluated me (he had a form that he filled out), and then met with me to discuss what he saw. As a student, of course my teachers gave me tests over the material. I also had to take the comprehensive exam for the bachelor's degree.

There is a case for instance here in my country when students are in the ninth grade(they finish primary school), and in the twelfth or thirteenth grade (they finish high school),the state would give standardized tests to all students, all we teachers have to do is just be in the room and time the tests.

The most popular form of alternative writing assessment is portfolio assessment. According to Bridwell-Bowles, 1990; Lucas, 1992; Smit et al, 1991 in Reid, 1993 portfolio is a collection of texts produced over a defined period of time to the specification of a particular context. It has several advantages: it reinforces commitment to writing processes and multiple drafts; it establishes the course as developmental and sequential; and it establishes a classroom writing environment as the basis for effective writing.

According to Brossell, 1986 in Kroll, 2003 writing assessment should reflect our best knowledge of how writing occurs and how is best taught. That is, it ought to proceed from an understanding of writing as a complex process of discovering and conveying meaning, a process that involves rhetorical, structural and mechanical choices.

Issues and challenges in assessment

Any well organized work, as well as the teaching and other educational activities during the implementation and completion must be verified to assess the level of achievement of the goals set. Therefore, the basic function of assessment is to improve the educational work. By assessing numerous teaching activities at the right time, feedback is provided on the results that the student and the teacher achieve in their work. Unfortunately, in today's Kosovo schools feedback often lacks to be given at the right time on the students' work and the results that they achieve in class. There are cases when a student by the end of class does not know what he has learned or what he has not managed to learn. On the other hand, the teacher does not have a clear picture of knowledge that students achieved in class, and in these situations, the teacher is not able to take appropriate corrective activities, nor can plan teaching in harmony with knowledge and skills that the students possess.

Regarding the new concept of assessment in the twentieth century, we can say that it has had a major impact in the American education system. The concept's characteristic is that the planning and organization of teaching must be initiated by the need of students, this means that instead of imposing from the outside, it should be started from what the students carry in themselves, instead of knowledge that will serve them in the future, the knowledge they will use now is needed, instead of passivity and formalism, activity and creativity should be possible, instead of the teacher to lead and guide, he/she should help and advise (Potkonjak, 1967, cited in Osmani 2010).

According to many sources, it is estimated that Rice is the first in contemporary assessment in the US who also used the knowledge tests. With the use of objective actions and instruments in assessing students' achievements, the use of traditional numerical grading ended. A great importance in the US has also been given to self-assessment. During the assessment we should take into consideration the needs of each individual for self-respect and cognition of their needs and develop positive personal needs and interests (Villutijević, 1992, cited in Osmani 2010).

Assessment policy and practice in schooling is being challenged to review the nature of the knowledge and skills being assessed. Also opening for review is the optimum range of contexts and conditions for collecting assessment information about how students work with and reconstitute knowledge. Based on my observations in class and conversations with teachers and students of the secondary schools in my region (Municipalities of Gjilan, Kamenica and Vitia). It has been identified that the most serious issues in the process of assessment are subjectivity, insufficient validity of assessment and grading, discontinuity of grading and lack of criteria for grading. During the assessment and grading only certain elements of what is defined as the object of assessment and grading are included, while the others are partially included or completely ignored. For example, little attention is paid to how students understand and analyze knowledge, how they explain it, comment it, connect it with other knowledge, think critically about it, exemplify it etc. Accordingly, the reason of ignoring the assessment and grading should be sought in the failure of teachers for not being permanently and completely trained to the demands of curriculum. They lack the knowledge about assessment processes, tools and models and so comes their inability to assess and grade students for something they have not learned.

Conclusion

By the way of conclusion I think that assessment is every teacher's job, they must know enough about assessment practices to be able to look at the assessments being brought into their programs or being taken externally by their students and evaluate them. During students' assessment, different techniques are likely to be used to assess the knowledge, while the assessment through questions and answers impromptu must be avoided because the teacher can be influenced by subjective factors of assessment such as: the current mood of the teacher, the attitude of the teacher towards the assessment, the current health and emotional situation of the student, sympathy and antipathy of the student, and the random factor which is manifested precisely what the teacher assesses according to the system of 3-4 questions. Therefore, the use of modern techniques and instruments to assess the knowledge significantly improves the achievements of our schools. Only when acting like this, traditionalism can be extinguished in the process of assessing students' knowledge. It is considered that the poor success in our schools is because of using traditional methods in assessing students' knowledge, and this practice should be changed. Therefore a firm understanding of how assessment works, what it can do and what it can not do, is an essential tool for today's teachers.

References

- [1] Bekteshi, S. B. (2009). Mbingarkimi i nxënësve me mësim në shkollë. Prishtinë.
- [2] Coombe, Ch., Davidson, P., O'Sullivan, B., Stoyhoff, S. (2012). The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Assessment. Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Dyla, B. (2001). Kuptimësia dhe formësia e diturive në mësim. Gjakovë.
- [4] Emerllahu, D. (1998). Bazat e metodikës së punës edukative. Fakulteti i Mësuesisë i UP-së, Prishtinë.
- [5] Haliti, Sh.(2003). Artikuj të përzgjedhur pedagogjik. Druckart. Prishtinë.
- [6] Kroll, B. (2003). Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing. Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Kryeziu, A. (2006). Vlerësimi në bazë shkolle. Shkëndija.
- [8] McAlpine, M. (2002). Principles of Assessment. CAA Centre, University of Luton.
- [9] Musai, B.(2002). Metodologjia e mësimdhënies. Tiranë.
- [10] Osmani, F. (2008). Teknikat dhe teknologjitë mësimore. USHT. Tetovë.
- [11] Reid, J. M. (1993). Teaching ESL Writing. Prentice-Hall.
- [12] Salihu, L., Zabeli, N. , Hoti, D. (2006). Të drejtat e fëmijës dhe etika e mësimdhënësit. KEC. Prishtinë.
- [13] Spiller, D. (2009). Principles of Assessment-Teaching development. University of Waikato.
- [14] Vagjid, N. (1990). Metodika e punës së pedagogut të shkollës (I). Rilindja. Prishtinë.
- [15] Zeneli, I. (2003). Bazat e standardizimit dhe vlerësimit në arsim. Libri Shkollorë. Prishtinë.
- [16] Zylfiu, Nj. (2004). Didaktika (Teori e mësimit dhe e mësimdhënjes). UP. Prishtinë.