

Recent Research in Black Sea Region on Assessment in Education (Review)

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Abstract

This article is written to inform educational community particularly in the respect of new tendencies in educational assessment and present a clear-cut picture of the recent studies conducted in the Black Sea Region. The review paper refers to the following countries: Georgia, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. It stresses the prevalent approach detected in these countries and sees the role of assessment as a tool to enhance the quality of education and obtain the reliable data that help professionals to make appropriate decisions in teaching and assessment.

Keywords: Assessment, Teaching, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Academic performance, Quality Enhancement.

Introduction

Assessment is one of the focal and integral parts of the educational processes due to aiming at enhancing the quality of education. Assessment permits to inform administrators about the state of the matter at the educational institution, to inform the parents about their children's success/failures, find out the existing problems, motivate teachers and students, improve the quality of teaching and learning, hold educational research objectively, and so on. It is notable that there are different ideas regarding the implementation of assessment strategies among policymakers, educators, students, administrators and parents throughout the world.

Research Conducted in Georgia

In Kitiashvili (2014) article, the focus is on teachers' assessment practices in Georgian general educational institutions. The study also aimed to identify Georgian teachers' attitudes towards assessment of the students' knowledge. Correspondingly, 928 teachers (92.7 % female and 7.2 % male teachers) were the subjects of a survey research that was conducted in Georgia. 61.4% of the subjects were 50 and 38.5 % were 51 +. During the study, the author observed 292 lessons in 106 general educational institutions in Tbilisi and all 10 regions of Georgia. The observation process covered three objectives: physical environment, social environment and teaching materials. The obtained data revealed that teachers apply complex assessment approaches. The results also showed that discussions were granted with much time and attention, but the primary goal was, unfortunately, to check the accuracy of knowledge and not students' higher order thinking skills. The teachers also detected their great preference to exploit comment in formative assessment, but the observation revealed a controversial picture - teachers rarely provided students with specific feedback on their performance. In conclusion, the author comes up with some focal recommendations for teachers:

- a) The process of assessment needs to be interactive;
- b) The process of assessment should not only contain closed-ended questions checking just factual knowledge, but also provide learners with open-ended questions that might provoke their higher-order reasoning skills and synthesize the data;
- c) The process of assessment should put a great emphasis on teacher feedback to enable learners to have a clear-cut picture of their academic performance;

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d) Teachers' professional development in contemporary assessment practices will change the climate in the classrooms (Kitiashvili, 2014).

In Pipia (2014) article, the focus is on the reliability and validity of assessment. The research tries to find the ways that would decrease the degree of measurement error that is inherent in all measurement. The author views the role of educational professionals in identifying the sources of measurement error and in minimizing their impact on the obtained sources. The study was conducted at the International Black Sea University, Georgia. 25 lecturers participated in the survey. The obtained data revealed that 46.15% of teachers always specify the educational objectives and tables of specifications before developing a classroom test. Surprisingly, the same percentage of teachers (46.15%) noted that they sometimes determine these factors before the test is administered, while 7.69% totally ignore this process. The data once again stresses that contemporary teachers are too busy and have a limited time; due to it, it may be tempting for them to skip these steps and simply commence writing the test.

The majority of teachers (58.33%) pointed out that no single assessment format can effectively measure the diverse range of educational objectives and outcomes. Once the table of specifications is designed, it should be used to develop items of different types: selected-response items, constructed-response items, portfolios and performance assessment. The data reflected that still there are many enough teachers (31.77%), who have negative attitudes towards developing guidelines for test administration. In addition to characteristics of the test itself, extraneous factors may affect the reliability and validity of assessment. Even though many teachers (69.23%) responded so, they do examine and estimate the reliability and validity of assessment. Most of them were not able to name the practical strategies for estimation and quality control. It is notable that 45.45% of the teachers showed their sensitivity towards personal factors and extraneous events that might influence test performance and almost the same number of teachers (45%) marked that they not so much pay attention to these factors in students' test performance (Pipia, 2014).

In Goctu (2013) dissertation, the author has identified traditional and alternative assessment practices in high schools of Georgia. The author worked out research with Georgian teachers, school administration and parents in order to have a clear-cut picture of the general assessment system and some possible modifications. The author held a questionnaire with 100 English language teachers and revealed that only 27% of them knew portfolio as an assessment tool in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Notably, among them some teachers even had quite a wrong understanding of the concept or did not have any experience of using portfolio in practice. However, the majority of the respondent teachers showed their satisfaction of using portfolios alongside with the traditional assessment. The survey conducted among parents revealed their preference to traditional assessment, which could be explained through their learning experiences.

Goctu also conducted an experiment comparing the ways of traditional and authentic assessment practices among 11th graders at Private Demirel College in 2011/2012. The researcher held an observation in three different groups:

Group 1- control group: no portfolio applications (purely traditional)

Group 2- experimental group A: showcase portfolio

Group - experimental group B: teacher-student portfolio

Teaching methodology in these three groups was identical. The experiment proved the effectiveness of combining portfolio and traditional assessment practices. Between the two experimental groups, showcase portfolio proved to be more motivating for the learners than teacher-student type of portfolio (Goctu, 2013).

Research Conducted in Russia

In Titova (2015) article, the importance of immediate feedback and enquiry-based strategies used by teachers in the mobile testing system has been presented. The research project was implemented at Lomonosov Moscow State University (LMSU,

Russia) during two semesters of the 2013-2014 academic years. The research population covered two experimental and two control groups of B1 level. Teachers in the experimental group used mobile testing system while the control group followed the traditional way of assessment. The analysis of obtained results enables to identify that mobile formative assessment had a great impact on increasing learners' level of motivation and collaboration skills as well (Titova, 2015).

Bogolepova (2013) in her article defined the importance of formative assessment in foreign language teaching and provided readers with practical strategies and activities. The author suggests integrating the following activities:

1. **Entrance Slips**- creating paper slips to write students' associations and assumptions
2. **Corners**- possible answers to the question are located in the corner of the room
3. **Sorting**- learners sort out the words according to the criteria
4. **Quick Pulse**- asking concept questions at any moment of the class
5. **Voting**- students select the answers with "yes" or "no" cards
6. **Graphics**- using mind-maps, Vienne diagrams, and tables for illustration
7. **Short Quiz**- constructed-response items for immediate feedback
8. **Ball Toss**- game-like activity to answer the question and catch a ball
9. **Grab Bag**- questions on paper slips are put in a bag for classroom use

The author concluded that the implementation of various formative tasks will promote and facilitate learning process (Bogolepova, 2013).

Prilipko's article outlines action research that refers to contemporary assessment practices in tertiary education institutions in Russia. The author criticizes traditional assessment methodology, which is based only on summative assessment approaches and stresses the importance of formative assessment tools to assess learning outcomes. The researcher designed a model to measure teachers' assessment competences. The model was based on three focal components: knowledge, practices and values/attitudes. The questionnaire was conducted among 30 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers from the Higher School of Economics with teaching experience of more than 10 years. The results revealed that the teachers preferred traditional assessment practices (evaluating knowledge and not the skills) in terms of values and attitudes. According to the respondents' responses, assigning the grades is the main objective of assessment, which pinpoints the dominant role of summative assessment practices. The data also showed that some teachers were not aware of the differences between formative and summative assessment, criterion-based rubrics, formulating learning outcomes and assessing them correspondingly. The researcher concluded that there is a discrepancy between what teachers perceive as compulsory for their assessment practices and what they actually do in the classroom. As a recommendation, the author suggested to design teacher training for their professional development based on the following content areas:

1. Competence-based education and student-centered pedagogy
2. Theory of assessment
3. Practice of formative assessment (Prilipko, n.a.)

In Klimenko & Sleptsova (2015) article, the focus is on contemporary approaches to assessment, particularly the aspects of formative assessment when working with first-year students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. The researchers observed and identified the difficulties the student had in terms of teaching material, communication with the teacher and working with the partner. The authors strongly believe that all these problems could be tackled through integrating formative assessment tools in the classroom.

Research Conducted in Turkey

Han and Kaya (2014) studied the impact of constructivist instruction on Turkish EFL teachers' assessment preferences. The school survey aimed at exploring the existing assessment practices and methodologies of teachers and drew some important differences according to their gender, educational degree, class size, teaching experience, and their former training on assessment. The participants of the study were 95 Turkish EFL teachers (73 females and 22 males) from different parts of Turkey. The obtained data revealed that the majority of subjects (48.4 %) find speaking to be the most challenging skill to assess while reading is the least challenging one (17.9 %). It was pinpointed that 44.2% of the teachers assess writing skills the most frequently, but the fact itself provokes some doubts by the authors as the majority of Turkish students taking university entrance exams might face some level of difficulty in writing. The study also stressed out that there is no visible difference between male and female teachers' assessment preferences, which was focused on assessment as learning (i.e., formative assessment) rather than assessment to inform (i.e., summative assessment used for administrative reasons).

In Eren (2010) article, great emphasis is on identifying the prospective teachers' conceptions about assessment. The research sample consisted of 304 prospective primary and secondary school teachers (201 females and 103 males) in the north-west of the Black Sea region in Turkey. The Staff Questionnaire (SQ) was distributed to obtain the needed data for analysis. The analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) results showed that the prospective teachers' values and practices were not varied as to their year of study, pointing that they were valid for both fourth and third-year teacher education students. Considering the fact that the third-year teacher education students did not have a practical experience, it was important to note that their values were shaped during the early periods of teacher education. It is notable that quite many prospective teachers valued constructivist assessment for learning more than they practiced, whereas they practiced traditional assessment of learning more than they valued. This approach is explained as the influence of school culture in Turkey. The author notes that the curriculum developers should take into consideration both dissonance and consonance between prospective teachers' values and practices, as it gives the initial picture of prospective teachers' later teaching practices in the classrooms (Eren, 2010).

The article written by Arslan & Demirhan & Ilker (2013) highlights the impact of the measurement and evaluation development program on pre-service education teachers' general perceptions and competency perceptions related to alternative assessment in education. Twenty-six pre-service teachers participated in measurement and evaluation development program, which also included field experience. The results showed that the subjects felt incompetent in the area of assessment, which could be explained through a lack of participation in the professional development programs. The authors suggest to enrich teacher preparation programs with more focus on assessment (Arslan, İlker, & Demirhan, 2013)

Yigit, Kiyici and Cetinkaya (2014) have studied the impact of testing on students' academic performance. The participants of this study were 98 freshmen (30 males and 68 females) from the Elementary Science Education department of Sakarya University in Turkey. Seven groups (six experimental and one control) were formed according to pre-test results. Four groups completed an intervening test (two of them received an immediate feedback), a worksheet that summarizes the topic was studied by two groups and the control group had no additional activity. The reason of having three different practice groups was to identify an existing discrepancy between the effectiveness of testing, receiving feedback and re-studying worksheets on retention of previously learned information. At the end of the quasi-experiment, a post-test was applied to determine the final retention. The obtained data aimed to investigate previously learned information and the effects of testing, receiving feedback and re-studying. The study revealed that exposing students to supporting practices resulted in a great retention of previously learned information regardless of the type of the practice. The authors suggest that the tests, which educational professionals use to assess their students' learning, should be used to enhance the quality of education rather than determining the level of learning (Yigit, Kiyici, & Cetinkaya, 2014).

Research Conducted in Ukraine

Leonidivna and Volodymyrivna (2013) have addressed the issue of language education after the reforms in the school-leav-

ing exams through implementing Standardized External Testing in 2009 in Ukraine. The main purpose of this initiative was to provide higher education institutions with a reliable evaluation instrument for selection and admission. Thirty language educators from different parts of Ukraine took part in the project and revealed some practical experience in test construction and administration. The observation on these processes showed that the main outcome was the integration into the international language community to enhance the level of reliability and validity in assessment. The research area of the project covered the following activities:

1. To support the UCEQA (Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment) in test development and administration;
2. To assist in developing a normative legislative basis in testing;
3. To strengthen Ukrainian citizens' support of reforming the admission system (Leonidivna & Volodymyrivna, 2013).

The article pinpoints the washback effect on educational processes and introduces an important initiative of Ukrainian educational authorities together with British Council to implement new academic programs at university level to prepare qualified specialists in language assessment. The analysis of obtained results enables to identify that the country has undergone very important stages of development:

1. Establishing a national testing center;
2. Involving professionals into test-making process;
3. Writing a bank of test tasks;
4. Developing a single national test;
5. Designing trainings for test developers and administrators;
6. Developing training materials for students;
7. Collecting the teachers and students' feedback;
8. Disseminating information about the test;
9. Carrying out extensive research into testing and assessment;
10. Fostering interest among the society (Leonidivna & Volodymyrivna, 2013)

Conclusion

- To increase the quality and efficiency of assessment, teachers have to be better aware of the innovations in the sphere of educational assessment and the contemporary requirements towards assessment. This should be done both through a course dedicated to educational assessment that will be delivered to future teachers and through regular professional self-development concerning the issue.
- It is thought-provoking that many teachers are not given an opportunity to take into account the personal and extraneous factors to measure reliability and validity of assessment, as they have to comply with administrative regulations (internal or external).
- The reliability and validity of assessment are of a paramount importance, as they enhance the quality of the product attained by the end of the educational process. Reliable data help professionals to make appropriate decisions in teaching and assessment.
- Formative, especially mvoible formative assessment positively influences the students' energy level and correspondingly, their motivation as well.
- The teachers' perceptions and beliefs about integrating complex assessment practices are positive, but the realization of these approaches in their classrooms lack teachers' professional readiness. More teacher trainings should be organized to enhance the quality of assessment in educational institutions.

- Many prospective teachers value constructivist assessment for learning. Formative assessment is very valuable, as it is naturally woven in the continuous learning. The implementation of various formative tasks will promote and facilitate the educational process
- The authors of the reviewed articles suggest enriching teacher preparation programs with more focus on assessment and enabling teachers to have a clear-cut picture of the concept understanding.
- The integration of authentic assessment tools such as portfolio in the classrooms will enhance students' level of motivation and have a positive impact on their academic performance.
- The assessment of students has to be done on a scientific basis; this is a sophisticated issue and, especially when the assessment concerns high-stakes exams, it has to be carried out by professional teams. Experience of assessment has to be researched, in order to optimize it gradually by considering the arising challenges.

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