

## Issues and Concerns in Classroom Assessment Practices

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### **Abstract**

*Assessment is an integral part of any teaching learning process. Assessment has large number of functions to perform, whether it is formative or summative assessment. This paper analyse the issues involved and the areas of concern in the classroom assessment practice and discusses the recent reforms take place.*

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### **1. Introduction**

According to Ebel (1972), the increase in the use of educational tests has been accompanied by an increase in criticism of the practice. Tests vary in quality, with some being particularly poor. He argued that educational testing may be socially detrimental for a number of reasons. First, it labels a child, which may damage his or her self esteem and decrease motivation. Ebel (1972) comments that tests should not be evaluated in terms of how accurately they predict later achievement, but in terms of how much they increase achievement by motivating and directing the efforts of students and teachers. Another criticism is that assessment encourages development of a single ability, and reduces the diversity of talent within society. A third argument is that assessors assume control of the educational curriculum. Brady (1997) suggested that, although assessment is intended to support the curriculum, there is a risk that it may come to dominate the curriculum because what is assessed is taken as an indication of what is important. Ebel (1972) argues that tests generally lag rather than lead curricular change. The aim of assessment should be ‘to educate and improve student performance, not merely to audit it’ (Wiggins, 1998).

### **2. Issues in Classroom Assessment**

In the context of educational practice there are some crucial issues with respect to assessment, which demand the attention of all those who are concerned with the quality of teaching and learning process. Some of them are described below.

#### **2.1. Poor Test Quality**

Tests may not show sufficient evidence of validity and reliability. Many tests used for educational assessments are not standardised or prepared not by undergoing the systematic test development procedure and applying psychometric principles. Such test does not possess the good qualities and fails to perform their functions and purpose. For example, the question papers used by many universities are criticized on the ground that they are inferior in quality and they fail to perform their educational functions of assessing and evaluating (Areekkuzhiyil, 2019). One of the reason for the poor quality of test are that the construction of good quality test require expertise, it is time consuming process and has to undergo a series of sequential procedures.

## **2.2. Domain Dependency Issue**

Cognitive scientific research reveals that general and specialised knowledge function in close partnership (Perkins and Salomon 1989). To be maximally effective, assessment requires the interaction of general principles, strategies, and techniques with reasonably deep cognitive domain understanding. That deep cognitive domain understanding includes the processes, strategies and knowledge important for proficiency in a domain, the habits of mind that characterise the community of practice in that domain, and the features of tasks that engage those elements. It also includes those specialised aspects of domain knowledge central to helping students learn (Ball, Thames, and Phelps 2008; Shulman 1986). A teacher who has weak cognitive domain understanding is less likely to know what questions to ask of students, what to look for in their performance, what inferences to make from that performance about student knowledge, and what actions to take to adjust instruction. The intellectual tools and instrumentation given to teachers may differ significantly from one domain to the next because they ought to be specifically tuned for the domain in question (Hodgen and Marshall 2005).

A possible approach to dealing with the domain dependency issue is to conceptualise and instantiate formative assessment within the context of specific domains. Any such instantiation would include a cognitive-domain model to guide the substance of formative assessment, learning progressions to indicate steps toward mastery on key components of the cognitive-domain model, tasks to provide evidence about student standing with respect to those learning progressions, techniques fit to that substantive area, and a process for teachers to implement that is closely linked to the preceding materials and, therefore, to the domain in question.

## **2.3. Measurement Issues**

Educational measurement involves four activities: (i) designing opportunities to gather evidence, (ii) collecting evidence, (iii) interpreting it, and (iv) acting on interpretations. Assessment is not simply the elicitation of evidence but also includes making inferences from that evidence. Assessment is an *inferential* process because others cannot know with certainty what understanding exists inside a student's head. They can only make conjectures or hypotheses based on what we observe from such things as class participation, class work, homework, and test performance. The measurement issue lies in the interpretation of evidences for learner performance and achievement. For example a weak performance in mathematics may be due to linguistic deficiency, but the same would wrongly interpret as underachievement in mathematics. This misinterpretation would lead to unnecessary course of action.

#### **2.4. System Issues**

It refers to the fact that assessment exists within a larger educational context. If that context is to function effectively in educating students, its components must be coherent. Gitomer and Duschl (2007) describe two types of coherence, internal and external. Assessment components can be considered internally coherent when they are mutually supportive; in other words, formative and summative assessments need to be aligned with one another. Those components must also be externally coherent in the sense that formative and summative assessments are consistent with accepted theories of learning, as well as with socially valued learning outcomes. External coherence, of course, also applies to other system components like the educational ideology, policies and programmes. In any event, if these two types of coherence are not present, components of the system will either work against one another or work against larger societal goals. Thus, the effectiveness of assessment will be limited by the nature of the larger system in which it is embedded and, particularly, by the content, format, and design. Ultimately, we have to change the system, not just the approach to assessment, if we want to have maximum impact on learning and instruction. Changing the system is a very big challenge indeed.

#### **2.5. Bias**

Blatchford and Cline (1992) suggest that the assessment process should operate without bias with respect to gender, social class, ethnicity, language use and religion. However, many researchers have demonstrated the existence of bias in educational assessment. Many researchers have argued that most assessments are culture biased and discriminates against certain ethnic groups. Anastasi (1972) argues that it is not productive to attempt to develop tests that are

‘culture-free’ (free from cultural influences) and, instead, there should be efforts to develop tests that are ‘culture-fair’ (common to different cultures).

### **3. Reforms in Assessment Practices**

Advances in understanding of human learning have highlighted inconsistencies between many traditional assessment and reporting practices and what is now known about the general conditions that promote successful learning. There has been growing recognition within the education communities of the need to develop assessment methods for a broader range of skills and attributes necessary for life in the 21st century, including the ability to work in teams, to innovate, to solve complex problems, and to analyse and evaluate diverse information. Advances in technology have raised the possibility and challenge of fundamentally transforming assessment processes and information in the future. The dichotomies like quantitative versus qualitative; formative versus summative; norm-referenced versus criterion/standards-referenced; tests versus assessments; internal versus external; continuous versus terminal; measurement versus judgement; assessment *of* learning versus assessment *for* learning became default basis for conceptualising and describing the field of assessment.

The position paper on examination reforms (NCERT, 2006) states the need for examination reforms in India as follows.

- (i) Indian school board exams are largely inappropriate for the ‘knowledge society’ of the 21st century and its need for innovative problem-solvers.
- (ii) They do not serve the needs of social justice.
- (iii) The quality of question papers is low. They usually call for rote memorization and fail to test higher-order skills like reasoning and analysis, let alone lateral thinking, creativity, and judgment.
- (iv) They are inflexible. Based on a ‘one-size-fits-all’ principle, they make no allowance for different types of learners and learning environments.
- (v) Because they induce an inordinate level of anxiety and stress. In addition to widespread trauma, mass media and psychological counselors report a growing number of exam-induced suicides and nervous breakdowns.
- (vi) Because there is often a lack of full disclosure and transparency in grading and mark/grade reporting.

(vii) Because there is need for a functional and reliable system of school-based evaluation.

The focus group (NCERT, 2006) suggests the following reforms in assessment practice.

(i) There should be more varied modes of assessment, including oral testing and group work evaluation.

(ii) Do not expect everything of everybody in every subject.

(iii) Flexibility in when exams are taken Enhanced reporting of performance

Some important reforms that have recently taken place in the field of assessment have been discussed below.

### **3.1. Open Book Examinations**

An open book examination is one in which examinees are allowed to consult their class notes, textbooks, and other approved material while answering questions. The traditional approach to education treats the information content of a subject to be the most important. The teacher's role is viewed as facilitating the transfer of information from the textbook to the students' minds. What the student is expected to do is to understand this information, retain it, and retrieve it during the final examination. Most conventional examinations test how much information the students have been able to store in their minds. In order to cope with this demand, students memorise the information in class notes and textbooks, and transfer it to answer books during the examination. In this type of examination, success depends on the quantity of information memorised, and the efficiency with which it is reproduced. But the alternative approach considers true teaching is teaching students how to learn. That is, teaching should equip students with the ability to acquire knowledge, to modify existing knowledge on the basis of new experience, to build new knowledge, and to apply available knowledge to solve problems and make intelligent decisions.

### **3.2. Online Examinations**

Online examination or online assessment is a web based interactive, independent and intelligent examination platform for students. It is an assessment that is accessed on a computer via the internet or a similar computer network. The assessment or test is read online and the responses are given online by selecting or checking a choice by clicking the mouse, typing a response, or perhaps even touching the computer screen with a special "pen" or speaking a response aloud using voice recognition technology. Online assessment may also be a vehicle for submitting a portfolio of student performances or completed assignments for the teacher to evaluate.

### **3.3. On Demand Examination (ODE)**

Where assessment takes place when the learner considers himself/herself are ready to take the same, such examination are called on demand examination. Under ODE, a unique question paper having defined number of items is generated randomly by the computer (on the day of the examination) out of the already developed question bank on the basis of question paper design and the blueprint of the subject. The question paper is unique for each student.

### **3.4. Take-home tests.**

Take-home tests allow students to work at their own pace with access to books and materials. Take-home tests also permit longer and more involved questions, without sacrificing valuable class time for exams. Problem sets, short answers, and essays are the most appropriate kinds of take-home exams. Be wary, though, of designing a take-home exam that is too difficult or an exam that does not include limits on the number of words or time spent (Jedrey, 1984). Also, be sure to give students explicit instructions on what they can and cannot do: for example, are they allowed to talk to other students about their answers? A variation of a take-home test is to give the topics in advance but ask the students to write their answers in class. Some faculty hand out ten or twelve questions the week before an exam and announce that three of those questions will appear on the exam.

### **3.5. Group Exams**

Some faculty have successfully experimented with group exams, either in class or as take-home projects. Faculty report that groups outperform individuals and that student respond positively to group exams. For example, for a fifty-minute in-class exam, use a multiple-choice test of about twenty to twenty-five items. For the first test, the groups can be randomly divided. Groups of three to five students seem to work best. For subsequent tests, you may want to assign students to groups in ways that minimize differences between group scores and balance talkative and quiet students. Or you might want to group students who are performing at or near the same level (based on students' performance on individual tests). Some faculty have students complete the test individually before meeting as a group. Others just let the groups discuss the test, item by item. In the first case, if the group score is higher than the individual score of any member, bonus points are added to each individual's score. In the second case, each student receives the score of the group.

### **3.6. Paired Testing**

For paired exams, pairs of students work on a single essay exam, and the two students turn in one paper. Some students may be reluctant to share a grade, but good students will most likely earn the same grade they would have working alone. Pairs can be self-selected or assigned. For example, pairing a student who is doing well in the course with one not doing well allows for some peer teaching. A variation is to have students work in teams but submit individual answer sheets (Murray, 1990).

### **3.7. Question Bank Systems**

In this system a large number of questions from each topic or unit of the syllabus are prepared in advance and a number of questions from each topic or unit of the syllabus at the time of examination or test are taken out from the pool. They are separately printed and test is conducted, with the help of these questions. Making question bank is a regular process in the sense that different varieties of questions of definite number are regularly constructed by experts and added to the bank. All these questions are standardized by adopting systematic procedure of item analysis and total reliability and validity of the test can also be calculated before administering it to the examinees. If question bank is stored in a system then we can give programme to the computer to bring out the required number of items from each topic. We can also get items of required difficulty value by using computer programme and computer can also calculate the reliability or validity of the test which consists of those items.

### **4. Summing Up**

Being a critical component of the process of education, assessment has to be practiced with extreme care and vigilance. Educational practitioners have to be very cautious of the issues involved in the assessment practices in classrooms and have to take steps to continuously improve its quality and modernise the practice.

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