

Student Views on the Assessment Practices of Instructors during Instruction

*Zekeriya NARTGÜN**

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the degree of instructor' assessment practices in the realization of the learning-teaching process in its various stages, in the identification of expected outcomes and various other practices in the same context by taking student views into account. The study was undertaken with 243 students attending Abant İzzet Baysal University Department of Education in the 2008-2009 academic year. The questionnaire used as data collection tool in the study was developed by the researcher. The results collected by means of student views showed that the majority of the instructors did not completely accomplish the tasks that they were supposed to do at the beginning of or during the teaching process in the framework of assessment. Also, in a similar manner, it was determined that the tasks that were expected from the instructors in the framework of performance-based assessment were not fulfilled by the majority of the instructors. The study presents important information to decision makers who create policies related to assessment in educational institutions.

Key Words

Assessment, Instruction, Teaching, Learning, Instructor.

* *Correspondence:* Assist. Prof. Dr. Zekeriya Nartgün, Abant İzzet Baysal University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, Bolu/Turkey.
E-mail: nartgun@yahoo.com

Measurement, evaluation, testing, and assessment are concepts which are used interchangeably in the learning-teaching process but which have comparatively different meanings and connotations from each other (Airasian, 1994; Nitko, 2004). Among these terms, “assessment” which is the focus of this study is defined as “the task of collecting and interpreting the information that will be used in the decision-making process” (Airasian, 1994). Assessment is present in every instance in the educational system in general and in the learning-teaching process in particular and it is an important and natural part of this process (Atkin, 2001).

Assessment is critically important since it helps form the foundations that are needed to base the decisions both in learning and teaching to the various stages of the learning-teaching process (the beginning, middle and the end of the process; Carr & Haris, 2001; Popham, 2003). Therefore, when the fact *that the right decisions can only be reached by solid information and solid information can only be obtained through healthy assessment methods* is considered, the role of quality assessment in the educational system will be very clear (Stiggins, Conklin & et al, 1992 as cited in Nitko, 2004).

Although assessment serves various purposes in the educational system such as making decisions related to teaching programs, educational policies etc. (Wragg, 2001), it can be argued that its specialized field of use is to increase the quality in teaching and learning (Atkin, 2001; National Research Council, 2003). Quality teaching provides quality learning (Darling-Hammond, 1999) and quality teaching is only possible with the provision of regular and quality assessment (Murtha, Stec, & Wilt, 2006; Tillema, 2009).

We can discuss three types of assessment according to the purpose of use. Assessment that is done to base decisions on at the beginning of the teaching-learning process is categorized as “diagnostic assessment” (<http://www.diagnostictestsupport.org/about/whatare.asp> “What are the diagnostic assessments,” 2009). Assessment that will form the decisions that are needed during the process is categorized as “formative assessment” (Murtha et al., 2006; Özçelik, 1992; Torrance, & Pryor, 1998) and assessment that will be used to base decisions on at the end of the process is categorized as “summative assessment” (Atılğan, Kan, & Doğan, 2007). The related literature has ample number of studies that focus on the efficacy of assessment in the process of teaching (Black, & William, 1998; Crooks, 1988; Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1986).

Modern approaches necessitate undertaking all the three assessment types in the teaching-learning process. Planning of teaching by taking the student competencies into consideration at the beginning of the process, constantly following the developments during the process in order to identify and overcome the shortfalls, making necessary arrangements by testing the efficacy of the educational services according to the results and finally evaluating the students as a whole according to their competencies are only possible by utilizing these three types of assessments together. Otherwise, the efforts will only result in using assessment in a limited manner for just mid-term and final exams to determine whether the students will pass or fail as is the case in many of the higher education programs and that will be a waste of time and effort altogether.

Assessment is one of the core factors in the efficacy of the teaching-learning process. Although that is the case, the relationship between these two concepts is usually overlooked. However, providing student participation in well-designed assessment tasks directly affects the studying strategies and consequently the learning of the students. Also, for most of the students, assessment means the subject matter itself. For this reason, the persons involved in the process should be attentive to several aspects in order for assessment which is accepted to be highly important to render the teaching-learning process ("Core principles of effective assessment," 2009).

The basic aim in the teaching process is the acquisition of the pre-determined target behavior by the students. For this reason, all assessment undertaken in this process is done in order to display and define the level of target behavior acquisition by the students. Several instruments and methods have been identified according to the structure of the target behaviors in the framework of the lessons. Tests formed by different types of questions, home works, projects, portfolios, and performance tasks are some examples (Kutlu, Doğan, & Karakaya, 2008; Nitko, 2004; Wiggins, 1998). The persons responsible from the development and application of these instruments and methods are instructors' in-class applications. In this regard, there are two important points that instructors need to consider: validity and reliability.

Validity is the appropriateness of the instruments and methods used in assessment in relation to the purpose. Instructors need to differentiate amongst, develop and apply the instruments and methods which will display the intended behavior change in students (Airasian, 1994).

Although it has various meanings, reliability is related to errors in results that are obtained through the assessment methods and techniques. The more error-free the results of measurement, the more reliable they are. Consequently, instructors should be able to grade results that are obtained through all assessment instruments and methods in the most objective manner possible (Gareis & Grant, 2008).

At the present day in which we need qualified manpower the most, it is a necessity and a must for the individuals responsible from the instruction in the higher education as in all educational institutions to help in the accomplishment of quality learning by introducing and displaying quality teaching practices. In this framework, instructors are in a position both to assess the quality of teaching practices they employ and the quality of student learning in the various stages of the teaching process. Therefore, they need solid information in order for their assessment to be accurate and appropriate. In this context, it is very important for instructors to have sufficient levels of information about assessment and assessment methods and utilize this information when it is called for in order to have accurate assessments. In other words, the abovementioned points are rather critical in bringing the teaching applications and the learning to a higher quality.

Taking this introduction as a starting point, this study is set out to identify through student views the level of instructor use of assessment practices expected to take place in the various stages of the learning-teaching process which are emphasized as being important in instruction. In this context, answers to these questions were sought:

1. According to student views, what is the percentage of instructors who undertake assessment practices and other tasks in the same context that are expected to be undertaken at the beginning of the instruction?
2. According to student views, what is the percentage of instructors who undertake assessment practices and other tasks in the same context that are expected to be undertaken while the instruction process is going on (during and at the end of the process)?
3. According to student views, what is the percentage of instructors who undertake assessment practices and other tasks in the same context that are expected during the instruction process in the framework of performance-based tasks?

Assumptions of the Study

It was assumed that student answers to the questionnaire were provided in a sincere manner.

The limitations of the Study

1. The study is limited with the views of students who attended Abant İzzet Baysal University, Department of Education in the 2008-2009 academic year, and who had taken or was in the process of taking Measurement and Evaluation course at the time of the study.
2. The study is limited to assessment practices and tasks related to this context by the instructors in the cognitive field.

Method

The population of the study which was undertaken by the survey method consisted of students who attended Abant İzzet Baysal University, Department of Education in various fields and who had taken or was in the process of taking Measurement and Evaluation classes at the time of the study. The study was completed by the participation of 243 students who were selected by random sampling method (Ural, & Kılıç, 2005). A questionnaire, developed by the researcher, was used as the data collection tool in the study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section provided the directions and personal information form. The second section listed the tasks expected from the instructors in the framework of assessment during the instruction process. There were two open-ended questions in the third and last section of the survey.

As the first step in the development of the questionnaire, books in Turkish and foreign languages (Airasian, 1994; Atılgan et al., 2007; Berberoğlu, 2006; Erkuş, 2006; Haladyna, 1999; Murphy, & Moon, 1989; Nitko, 2004; Turgut, 1983; Wiggins, 1998) were examined in relation to the purposes of the use of assessment in the teaching-learning process and the tasks expected from the instructors in this context. The obtained results were itemized to create the questionnaire. The tasks expressed in the given items were questioned by a group of 20 students who had taken classes in measurement and evaluation in order to find out if the items corresponded with the tasks that the instructors were expected to do and it was observed that all students answered all the items as "yes." The survey was examined as a whole for content validity

by a group of 5 students who had completed their masters in science degrees in the field of educational measurement and evaluation and the validity in this regard was found to be sufficient.

The questionnaire developed was given to students in the 2008-2009 academic year. The data obtained from the 1st and 2nd sections of the survey were processed into SPSS 15.0 and were ready for analysis. The processed data were analyzed for percentages and frequencies for each item in order to search for answers given under the heading "The Purpose of the Study." The open-ended questions in the survey were analyzed for their content. The obtained results were discussed with the results of the quantitative analysis.

Discussion

Studies on assessment in the literature are usually about utilizing different assessment techniques in instruction for various purposes (e.g., Agnes, & Cochrane, 2008; Carr, 2002), the practices of assessment in classrooms by instructors (e.g., Cheng, Rogers, & Hu, 2004), or the conceptual competencies of the instructors related to assessment (e.g., Taras, 2008). There has been no study in literature related to the identification of levels of realization of assessment tasks by instructors during instruction according to student views. Therefore, the results obtained from this study were discussed in its own context.

The findings obtained related to the first research question showed that although the instructors who informed students about the acquisitions (target behaviors) in classes and the assessment undertaken in this framework was high in proportion, the number of instructors who did not inform the students in this regard was still too high to be considered important. Hence, it seems unavoidable to have trouble focusing the classes and in learning for students who have had no information provided by their instructors on what to learn during the process and how they would be tested later to make sure they have learned those points. On the other hand, the majority of the instructors were observed to have undertaken no assessment related to the readiness levels of students at the beginning of the instruction. Overlooking this point which carried an important weight in the planning of instruction in accord with individual differences can be seen as a deficiency. Also, the absence of such a practice that should be carried out as a diagnostic assessment

procedure by the instructor will eliminate the chance of accurate and absolute comparison between the status of students at the beginning and end of the process. This, in turn, will mean instructors will lose the chance to undertake self-assessment which is related to the efficacy of the instruction service they provide. When taken as a whole, the findings related to the first research question showed that the instructors did not fully accomplish the tasks that were expected from them at the beginning of the instruction process.

The findings regarding the second research question implied that the majority of the instructors were not engaged in assessment procedures to determine student deficits in the instruction process. The lack of applications and practices in the framework of formative assessment meant that work towards overcoming these deficits would also be overlooked. But, it is highly important for the future lives of students to evaluate quality learning in short intervals and to determine problems, if any in order to take precautions to correct them. The findings are important since it points to an important deficit in this context.

Another finding obtained in regard to the second research question was the fact that instructors did not allow different question types in mid-terms and finals and did not have sufficient number of questions in tests to evaluate all the critical acquisition points. This finding is important since it showed that summative assessment techniques used by instructors carried the problem of content validity. When the fact that students cannot be assessed in all the topics in the subject matter accurately is taken into consideration, it is unavoidable that the pass-fail judgment given about them will also be far from the reality. But, all assessment practices undertaken during the instruction process should serve the ideal that decisions related to students must be accurate and to the point.

Another important finding obtained in the framework of the second research question was the fact that the majority of the instructors did not share the answers and keys to diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment and the fact that they did not provide feedback regarding these. The lack of these practices prevented students to a great extent from seeing their own errors and undertaking initiatives to overcome these deficits. If we rate the problem for the instructor, it is apparent that identification and remedying of topics that are lacking will definitely be missed in this manner.

Another important finding obtained in the framework of the second research question was the fact that the majority of the instructors prepared a report on the general success level of the class but they did not share it with their students. Since this was not done, students could not accurately determine their level of ranking among the other students who took the same class. On the other hand, lack of such a practice made it impossible to compare and contrast different groups who took the same classes and to determine the most positively affected group from the instruction. Taken as a whole, the findings obtained in regard to the second research question pointed to the fact that instructors did not provide what was expected from them in the instruction process in relation to assessment.

According to the findings in relation to the third research question, it was seen that the instructors did not show diligence in designing the performance work in such a way that students could apply high level cognitive skills and did not take student interest and requests into consideration in the allocation of this type of work to the students. In addition to this, according to the findings, the majority of the instructors did not inform students about the criterion in preparing the work, did not provide guidance during the process and did not provide students with information about the strong and weak sides of the performance work after examining it.

The findings are important since they pointed to the fact that there were problems in the quality of learning through performance-based work. It does not seem possible to reach the target with performance work that does not necessitate the use of higher level cognitive skills, that does not have pre-defined criteria, that does not take student interest into equation, that is not conducted by the guidance of the instructor and that does not provide feedback. On the other hand, it can be said that the work undertaken in the framework of performance-based assessment is far from serving the aim and full of problems in regard to reaching decisions about the student in the present situation.

The one and only point that was expressed to be done accurately by all instructors was the presentations of all the work which benefited the learning of other students as well. But, when we consider the deficiencies in the preparation process we can debate the level of benefit they will provide to student learning. Taken as a whole, the findings obtained in regard to the third research question pointed to the fact that instruc-

tors did not fully accomplish the tasks that were expected from them in the framework of performance-based assessment.

The answers provided to the first open-ended question pointed to the fact that instructors mostly used open-ended questions during testing and used just a few multiple choice questions. The instructors expressed the reason for their abundant use of open-ended questions stating that these questions were easier for the students to prepare for, better to get the students to work harder, more suitable to test the power of interpretation in students, easier to use in suppressing behaviors such as cheating and that the instructors wanted the students to fail. According to students, the reason for instructors to prefer multiple-choice questions was that these type of questions were easier to grade and more comprehensive to test more subject matters.

The answers provided to the second open-ended question pointed to the fact that majority of the students received much lower grades than their expectations in written exams and in work such as homework-projects and the students stated that they could not provide any grounds for the lower-than-expected grades since they were not fully aware of the criterion that the instructors used in grading. On the other hand, a group of students expressed their beliefs that both the written exams and the reports related to work such as homework, projects etc. were graded by the instructors without being examined and they stated that point as the reason of lower grades than their expectations. A certain group of students also expressed their belief that instructors knowingly granted low grades so as they could open summer classes.

When we consider the answers provided to the two open-ended questions together, points can be made: the preference for open-ended questions and lack of different question types during written exams will cause validity to be low since comparatively less number of questions can be asked during exams that way. This situation is one of the most unwanted points in assessment related work. Another important point was the view of students stating that the instructors did not grade their answers during exams in addition to reports related to work such as homework and projects. The fact that instructors did not share the results with the students and did not provide feedback and guidance was one of the factors that helped form this belief. Another striking finding was the view of the students expressing that the instructors knowingly and willingly granted them lower grades so that they could open summer courses. So,

the lack of accurate assessment work during the instruction process not only causes lack of benefits to teaching and learning but also creates unwanted ideas to form in the minds of the students.

Suggestion

The suggestions reached through the results obtained in the study are below:

1. Higher education institutions should develop, apply, and supervise university and faculty/college-based policies related to assessment.
2. Similar work can be undertaken that will allow comparisons and contrasts among faculties and departments.
3. Work can be undertaken that will investigate the differences in the use of assessment among instructors according to their official title.
4. In addition to student views, studies that take the views of instructors into consideration can be undertaken.

References/Kaynakça

- Agnes, M. R., & Cochrane, D. K. (2008). Listening to students: How to make written assessment feedback useful. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9(3), 217-230.
- Airasian, P. W. (1994). *Classroom assessment*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Inc.
- Atılğan, H., Kan, A. ve Doğan, N. (2007). *Eğitimde ölçme ve değerlendirme*. Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Atkin, J. M. (2001). *Classroom assessment and national science education standards*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Berberoglu, G. (2006). *Sınıf içi ölçme ve değerlendirme teknikleri*. İstanbul: Morpa.
- Black, E., & William, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Fhi Delta Kappan*, 80(2), 139-148.
- Carr, C. S. (2002). Assessing learning process: Useful information for teacher and students. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 37(3), 156-162.
- Carr, J. F., & Haris, E. D. (2001). *Succeeding with standards: Linking curriculum, assessment and action planning*. Virginia, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cheng, L., Rogers, T., & Hu, H. (2004). ESL/EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices: Purposes, methods and procedures. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 360-389.
- Crooks, T. J. (1988). The impact of classroom evaluation practices on students. *Educational Research*, 58(4), 438-481.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1999). *Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Erkuş, A. (2006). *Sınıf öğretmenleri için ölçme ve değerlendirme: Kavramlar ve uygulamalar*. Ankara: Ekinoks.
- Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (1986). Effects of systematic formative evaluation: A meta-analysis. *Exceptional Children*, 53(3), 199-208.
- Gareis, L., & Grant, C. (2008). *Teacher-made assessments: How to connect curriculum, instruction, and student learning*. Larchmond, Eye on Education Inc.
- Haladyna, T.M. (1999). *A complete guide to student grading*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- What are the diagnostic assessments*. (2009). Diagnostic test support. Ohio. Retrieved FEBRUARY 12, 2009 from <http://www.diagnostictestsupport.org/about/whatare.asp>.
- Core principles of effective assessment: Enhancing learning by enhancing assessment*. (2009). JANUARY 10, 2009 from <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/05/index.html>.
- Kutlu, Ö., Doğan, D. C. ve Karakaya, İ. (2008). Öğrenci başarısının belirlenmesi: Performansa ve portfolyoya dayalı durum belirleme. Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Murtha, L., Stec, E., & Wilt, M. (2006). Using assessment as a tool to improve learning. An IFLA Workshop. *IFLA Journal*, 32(4), 294-3009.

Murphy, P., & Moon, B. (1989). *Developments in learning and assessment*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

National Research Council. (2003). *Assessment in support of instruction and learning: bridging the gap between large-scale and classroom assessment* (Workshop Report). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Nitko, A. J. (2004). *Educational assessment of students*. New Jersey, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Özçelik, D. A. (1992). *Ölçme ve değerlendirme*. Ankara: ÖSYM Yayınları.

Popham, W. J. (2003). *Test better teach better: The instructional role of assessment*. Virginia, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tillema, H. H. (2009). Assessment for learning to teach: Appraisal of practice teaching lessons by mentors, supervisors and student teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(2), 155-167.

Taras, M. (2008). Summative and formative assessment. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9(2), 172-192

Torrance, H., & Pryor, J. (1998). *Investigating formative assessment: Teaching, learning and assessment in the Classroom*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Turgut, M. F. (1983). *Eğitimde ölçme ve değerlendirme metotları*. Ankara: Yargıcı Yayınları.

Ural, A. ve Kılıç, İ. (2005). *Bilimsel araştırma süreci ve SPSS ile veri analizi*. Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık.

Wiggins, G. (1998). *Educative assessment: Designing assessment to inform and improve student learning*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass A Wiley Imprint.

Wragg, E. C. (2001). *Assessment and learning in secondary schools*. Florence: Routledge.