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The Role of Assessment in Pedagogic Context: A Descriptive Study of Classroom Assessment Practices of Junior School Teachers

Shamim Ali, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discover the need of professional development of junior school teachers on evaluation and assessment skills of classroom activity. Although these two skills are a vital part of pedagogy, there are still some teachers who are unaware of this important skill, or they are uninformed of this important aspect of teaching methodology. These teachers are not incompetent, but they lack this knowledge, therefore, they cannot make correct decisions about student's achievements. Ignorance of this important aspect makes the situation in the classroom very deplorable.

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So it is high time that Education planners and designers take some steps to correct this situation. I designed a questionnaire on a four (4) Likert scale .It consisted of ten statements on the concept of effective classroom assessment skills and administered to 20 school teachers in the Federal Capital of Pakistan. The teachers were asked to indicate whether they require professional developmental training, or not. The responses were analyzed statistically, using descriptive statistics.

The results from the analysis of teachers “self-perceived professional development needs on classroom assessment indicated that teachers still lack classroom assessments skills. This has implications for immediate professional development of junior school teachers on classroom assessment skill for effective learning and teaching

Introduction

Successful teachers are those who possess a deep understanding of their subject matter; secondly they can apply proper teaching methods, and last, they can apply different assessment strategies to evaluate learning outcomes. Therefore, assessment can be considered an essential part of instruction. But many ESL teachers still do not have proper assessment skills to evaluate learners’ learning outcomes. In learning outcomes, the observation of students, their answers to questions in class and written performance are included. Learning outcomes also give information about teacher-made tests and quizzes and at the same time they give information about the teaching methods of the instructor. Therefore, it can be said that all proceedings of classroom whether it is assessment, instruction, decision making or classroom observation, all are vital parts of learning outcomes.

Purpose of Assessment

Teachers with a tangible background in classroom assessment skills are well positioned, because they incorporate proper methodology with proper assessment skills. These teachers are capable of being understood and evaluated, and therefore, regarded as competent and professional teachers. Professional development plays a very important role in a teacher’s life. It

is a key determining factor for valuable teaching. But in our primary schools teachers are not competent enough in the field of evaluation and assessment. Sometimes the teachers don't make fair and correct assessment. Because of this they take wrong decisions and students suffer due to their ignorance. Teachers should know the development factors of their students and they should be aware of their outcomes and accomplishments.

The purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve the procedure of obtained knowledge and to test out the teaching methodology. Assessment and evaluation are difficult tasks that all teachers are required to do in the best way possible, to check the achievements of learners. Teachers should apply well-planned assessment and evaluation practices in the classrooms. Stiggins, 2006 admitted that many teachers completed their education and they obtain the highest degree, but they are not fully aware of training and evaluation; and at the same time it is not included in their curriculum as well. There should be some course for the teachers from the field of evaluation and assessment.

Need for Assessment is Understood by Teachers in Pakistan

Many teachers in Pakistan do understand the need for assessment and evaluation. But they really need this training to assess their students' learning outcomes and performance. Many junior school teachers are willing to learn always classroom assessment skills. From past history it can be said that junior secondary school teachers were lacking in classroom assessment skills, to assess effectively, their students' learning outcomes. Junior school teachers are now willing for more training.

2. Literature Review

Stiggins (1999) used the term "assessment literacy", which is a way of defining the particular kinds of assessment skills teachers needed. He noted that many teachers did not have coursework in their pre-service programs to develop these assessment skills. In many countries teachers need professional development, and they should be made aware of classroom assessment skills. They should know techniques for successful teaching and learning. Research is required to find out the need for professional development. Assessment improves the relationship between teachers and students.

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Shepard (2000) discussed the need for classroom assessment skills. He suggested that teachers ought to apply following changes in their evaluation and assessment process:

- a) Teachers should have the conversations with students so that students will develop greater understanding.
- b) During discussion the student's knowledge will be enhanced and their learning goals will be defined explicitly.
- c) Teachers should do need analysis.
- d) Need analysis will help teachers to gauge the prior knowledge of their students.
- d) Teachers will create programs and plan for better understanding and comprehension.
- e) Teachers will find out the students' interests.
- f) Corrective feedback will enhance the process of learning.
- g) Teachers will set clear criteria for checking the performance.

To assess the performance of students is a tough job for all teachers. Teachers who have not taken the professional training would benefit through effective training courses on classroom assessment skills. In Pakistan such training programmes are yet to be offered to all teachers. But teachers show their concern for classroom evaluation and assessment. McMillan (2000) implied that instructors with a concrete background in classroom assessment skills are well positioned, because they incorporate proper methodology with proper assessment skills.

According to Marso & Pigge (1988), teachers lack the skills of statistical analyses of test data. It is very important for evaluation and assessment practices. Still teachers are not convinced of applying statistical tools to improve the quality of their evaluation and assessment process.

As I have mentioned in the above paragraph the teachers do not perform statistical analyses of test data, that don't know how to measure reliability and how to conduct item analysis. Mertler, (2000) also indicated that teachers followed specific steps to ensure validity and reliability about half of the time or less. All over the world it is known as the best practice. Galluzzo, 2005 states that in teaching "assessment and evaluation are the best partner's". In the same year Graham, 2005 also stressed upon the fact that teachers should apply well planned assessment and

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evaluation practices in the classrooms. Stiggins, 2006 admitted that many teachers completed their education and they obtained high degrees but they were not fully aware of training and evaluation; at the same time, it is also seen it was not included in their curriculum. Classroom assessment engages two key types of activities: basically, it is a collection of information and measurement of outcomes. Measurement and assessment can be achieved in a number of ways. To measure the learning, teachers give different kinds of tests, conduct oral questions and answers session, giving home assignment activities and doing problem solving tasks. Teachers measure the outcomes by counting the scores systematically. Some teachers question the purpose of assessment. The main purpose of assessment is called summative evaluation. Its primary aim is to check students' performance. The second important aspect is to monitor their progress. Since the purpose of this kind of assessment is to make the progress smooth, it is called formative evaluation. From the literature reviewed, it can be said that all over the world, teachers want to have professional development with regard to classroom assessment skills and techniques, for effective teaching and learning outcomes.

3. Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were:

Q. 1. What are junior Model's school teachers' self perceived professional growth needs?

Q. 2 Can Technology be used for assessment purposes at various levels in classroom?

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample Size

20 teachers were selected randomly from ten (05) junior model schools in Islamabad .All teachers were trained and currently teaching English. Ten teachers had done B.A .They had gone through a four-years' teachers training program .Five teachers had taken their CT course. This course is basically for primary school teachers. Five teachers were holders of Masters degree in

various subjects. The common feature among all of them was that they had undergone Junior Certificate course in teachers training.

Their teaching experiences ranged from 02 to 07 years. All of them helped in completing the questionnaire.

4.2 Instrument

The questionnaire was designed in a very simple language based on daily teaching situations. It was divided into two parts: A and B. In section A, the teachers were asked about their background information, and section B consisted of ten (10) closed ended questions in statements form. As mentioned earlier, these questions were in the form of statements with reference to the learners' daily life situations and learning problems in a typical class. I have used the concept of Zhang and Burry- Stock (2003), Mertler (2003), Gronlund (2006), which discusses the role of successful learning and positive outcomes. There were altogether ten statements for them to consider: For analytical purposes, the above ten statements were rated in the degree of agreement: "Strongly agree", "agree", "No idea", "disagree" and "Strongly disagree". For the sake of quantifying the data for mathematical representations, the different degrees of agreement stretch on a 5-point scale, from "1" for "Strongly agree" to "5" for "Strongly disagree" was used

The data were coded and fed to the SPSS database for statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics provided an overall view of the participants.

5. Data Analysis

Table : Results of teachers responses to the questionnaire explaining the mean, standard deviation

	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-values
1.	I always select appropriate classroom assessments methods for my students	4.3802	.62200	.08208	7.380
2.	I always provide appropriate feedback to my students	4.3054	.53134	.07248	8773
3.	I do have a concept of assessment error validity and reliability	2.1760	2.1760	.68550	.20016
4.	I know how to Interpret the data by applying percentile	3.3244	.73284	.20582	7.638
5.	I assess prior knowledge background and experience of my students.	4.3086	.76086	.22052	5.305
6.	I avoid bias in classroom assessments	4.0705	.98020	.23336	3.554
7.	I always apply different theories of classroom assessment	4.0703	.78020	.23336	3.554
8.	I can handle the data on SPSS	3.8173	1.10474	.24033	2.775

9.	I consider classroom assessments as the main objectives of my teaching	4.8021	2.12063	.24285	3.433
10.	I always use computers for classroom assessments	2.0373	2.06674	.22546	3.005

The responses of the twenty school teachers were analyzed applied SPSS (version 14) for descriptive analysis to check standard deviations and means.. From the responses analyzed it was perceived that all teachers wanted to have professional development. For effective learning outcomes and teaching all teachers were in the favor of learning assessment and evaluation skills.

90% teachers were in favor of applying SPSS. During discussion these teachers were very optimistic about using it .It was their opinion that this will help transferring your ideas into digits that could be used effectively. Statistical analysis could help teachers in forecasting and predicting future programmes in the best way possible .The data also suggested that the best teachers and syllabus designers are those, who can understand and utilize the information efficiently

At the same time most of the teachers were in favor of using electronic assessment tools, such as computers and calculators .These teachers were in the opinion that electronic tools helped to reduce the load of assessment. These electronic tools can be used to develop effective learning. A computer in assessment provides various testing options .A broad variety of assessment techniques lead these teachers to computer-based achievement. All of the teachers were in favor of using computers for assessment, as a time saving strategy and it provides a quick means of assessment and feedback to the students.

All of the teachers were of the opinion that there should be harmony between formative assessment and summative assessment procedures. It should be designed to minimize the burden on students and teachers/

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that junior model schools teachers require professional development on classroom evaluation assessment skills, because teachers' presentation in the class is a blend of many features. These features include teachers and their philosophy of Assessment Reform. This Reform describes the teacher as an educated, well informed and knowledgeable catalyst of the teaching and learning process, which directs and supports all learners to achieve their goals in an explicit manner. However, most of the classroom teachers are not experienced, proficient and well-informed in classroom assessment skills; therefore, these teachers cannot make correct decisions about students' performance. It can be seen that there is a gap between classroom practice and theoretical knowledge; relevant short courses can be set up for strengthening teachers' professional growth.

7. Recommendations

In order to facilitate teachers, there are a few recommendations for all teachers. There should be seminars and workshops on effective classroom assessment and handling SPSS that need to be organized for all teachers. Appropriate courses can be designed because this is the only way to train the teachers, go through to assess the strengths and shortfalls of junior model school teachers. There should be proper monitoring of classroom assessment skills by professional and experienced persons. Teachers should set up a system of sampling students' outcomes for national monitoring, because it will reduce the overall test burden and students will get immediate feedback

8. Implications

Administration should provide due attention and resources to create developmental criteria, and teachers should have access to well designed assessment skills .Teachers should

have proper understanding, which can help them make fair judgments of learner's outcomes .Assessment and evaluation courses should be conducted and it should be open to all.

Teacher should develop the concept of self assessment in students .Students should be involved in self-assessment, and they should be made aware of this fact that it is an ongoing process. At the same time full participation is required in formative and summative assessment for enhancing quality assurance system. For that purpose quizzes and tests are most appropriate, but it should not be a regular practice, because students will lose their interest

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