

## استخدام التقييم لتحسين تعليم اللغة

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لقد تم التأكيد علي الانتقال من عملية التقييم إلي استراتيجية التعليم المنظور و التقييم يجب أن يحدد و يدعم تعليم التلميذ أثناء الدراسة بدلا من اختبار الحصيلة التعليمية بعد انتهاء الدراسة ، و استخدام التقييم لغرض التعليم يدعم بقوة انغماس الطلاب و رغبتهم في الانتباه إلي ما يعزز أداءهم داخل الفصل وخارجه .  
هذا النوع من التقييم يساعد الطلاب علي معرفة ، وفهم قدراتهم التعليمية من حيث الضعف و القوة، و الاتجاه القائم الان بخصوص دور التقييم في الرفع من التعليم يتطلب من المتعلمين الانخراط ، والمشاركة الفعالة في النشاطات الفصلية بدلا من السلبية ، والاعتماد علي المدرس ، وذلك لتطوير قدراتهم المعرفية و التعليمية داخل وخارج الفصل الدراسي ، و بالرغم من ذلك لقد دار جدل كبير حول أهمية طرق التدريس التفاعلية والانتقال من طريقة المدرس التقليدي الذي يقود الفصل الدراسي إلي جعل هذا الفصل بيئة تعليمية مناسبة لتبادل المعلومات و الافكار و استخدام الطرق الجيدة والحديثة لتعليم الطلاب علي الرغم من أن أغلب مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية في الوقت الحالي يقودون سير العملية التعليمية داخل الفصول الدراسية مع استخدام أساليب تقليدية في تقييم اعمال الطلاب غير ملائمة لحدوث التعليم الجيد حيث يتم استبعاد الطلاب من المشاركة والانخراط في العملية التعليمية، و في الختام يهدف هذا البحث إلي مناقشة الدور المهم للتقييم في تحسين تعليم اللغة الانجليزية.

## Using Assessment to Improve Stud Language Learning

### Abstract

There has been a shift of emphasis from assessment to a learning perspective. Assessment should determine and support student learning quality during study rather than to examine student learning quantity after study. Assessment for education strongly supports the involvement of students in their won learning. It helps students to know their strengths and weaknesses. Current trends in assessment and learning require that learners need to be actively involved in classroom activities rather than to be passive and dependent ones.

Nevertheless, there had been much debate on the issue of interactive teaching methods – a move from traditional teacher-led classrooms to a more communicative context which requires learner and learning-centred approaches. Yet, most of English language teachers are still dominating the classes and using inappropriate traditional assessment forms in which students are excluded from taking part in the learning process. Finally, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the essential role of assessment in the enhancement of student learning in everyday English classes.

### **Background of the Study**

Assessment would perform the function of supporting student learning. Hence, there is a growing trend towards the use of assessment in improving student learning through active participation in the learning process. Current trends in language teaching and learning require that teachers would have positive belief that students can enhance their own learning through formative assessment principles that would be useful for involving students in their learning. Both teachers and learners, therefore, need to adopt learner-centred assessment in which students can participate in their own learning and develop an awareness of how their needs can be satisfied to improve their ability. Hence, it is important for students to do self-assessment and check their own performance in order to meet their needs, identify their learning problems and improve their performance. This requires that they need to compare their own work to criteria and/or standard and then to deal with assessment feedback before submitting their work to the teacher. In this regard, there is an urgent need for qualified teachers to adopt new methods for solving the problems and using different techniques to improve assessment and learning. Then, more effort would be made to raise the quality of EFL teaching and learning inside classrooms with the aim of encouraging

students to collect and construct a wide knowledge through self-learning and then developing the process of thinking to keep pace with the latest innovations in classroom learning. In accordance with these aims, it is important that students to develop an awareness of how their own work can be improved through using assessment procedures that are appropriate for classroom assessment. And most importantly, English language teachers need to adopt and support the role of a learning facilitator in the classroom to give students a chance to take part in the learning and assessment processes mainly because “it is a good opportunity for the students to speak the target language” (Macfarlane, 2000: 05).

However, the new English curriculum incorporated the use of both learner-centred assessment and student-cantered learning principles adopted in Libyan classrooms considering that educational assessment is an integral part of the new curriculum which supports the natural processes of language learning (GPCE, 2008). Orfi & Borg (2009: 250), therefore, found that “there was thus clearly a tension between the English curriculum and its assessment”. Some EFL teachers in the Libyan context adopt older teaching methods and inappropriate assessment forms to judge students’ performance and improve classroom learning (see for example, Shihiba, 2011; Grada, 2014; Dalala, 2014). This would seem to support the claim by Grada (2014: 259) that

As a result, students are still relying on their teachers showing a passive view in most Libyan classrooms. This may conflict with the fundamental principles of modern assessment forms and new teaching techniques in which learners need to be involved in their own learning and become more independent of their teachers.

### **English Language Assessment in Libyan Context**

The Ministry of Education is mainly responsible for dealing with the Libyan education system as well as the Centre of

Educational Curricula and Educational Research through which documents about the assessment policy and criteria for judging students' performance would be issued and introduced to the Administration of Examination. The assessment process of English language in Libyan classroom contexts is governed by an annual official document that establishes the assessment criteria for the teachers to deal with the students' final outcomes. The assessment is in the shape of a worksheet showing, for example, multiple-choice items and matching items...etc. The process of assessment is mainly based on agreed criteria by which teachers can grade students' learning achievements. Two mid-term exams need to be conducted during the academic year study. Students would be examined in all subjects at the end of each term and students' finals would be taken at the end of year study as well. Teachers need to test and examine students' language learning skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing (see also, Grada, 2014; Libyan Ministry of Education annual document, 2014).

The new communicative English curriculum aimed to keep a balance between theory and practice of language teaching, learning and assessment in Libyan classrooms (GPCE, 2008). Orfi & Borg (2009) argue that teachers could understand the rationale behind their instruction – their roles as facilitators which are not congruent with those intended in the reformed curriculum. In his study, Orfi & Borg (2009: 252) confirmed that “policy changes in pedagogy not supported by changes in assessment may have little practical impact in the classroom. Thus in this study, despite a new communicative curriculum, classroom practices continued to be shaped by discrete item examinations based on the memorization of grammar and vocabulary”. From this, it seems that there is a mismatch between the aims and the objectives intended in the modern curriculum and the assessment process adopted in the classroom (see also, Shihiba, 2011; Grada, 2014; Dalala, 2014). For example, Shihiba (2011) criticized the issue of

memorisation in grammar instead of using instructional practices to communicate language skills. Another criticism has been offered in that assessment criteria was fixed and designed by the Administration of Examination. As a result, this aspect may limit the teachers' role as facilitators and protect students from being developed and become independent learners. In addition, after investigating teachers' implementation of speaking assessment, Grada (2014) pointed out that novice teachers' current knowledge of speaking assessment has influenced by wider contexts, namely institutional, social and political. The study also indicated that teachers' assessment knowledge seemed a bit complex and not to be sufficient to deal with speaking assessment practices in the classroom. They interpreted the concept of speaking assessment in different ways as well as their beliefs regarding implementation of this strategy in the classroom settings were completely different. Moreover, the teachers supported the role of social constructionism in understanding and developing teachers' content knowledge of language assessment (ibid).

#### Assessment and Learning

It has been argued that assessment and learning are interrelated – they are closely connected and affect each other (Black and Wiliam, 1998). “There is an understandable tension between the desirability in educational and motivational terms of involving learners in assessment, and questions about the objective reliability of their self-assessment” (Tudor, 1996: 164). It is argued that the shift in the teacher and the student roles in the classroom is a concept of both learner-centred practice and learner-centred assessment (McCombs, 1998: 400). In other words, in order to make students part in classroom activities and discussions, students would take their responsibility to judge their own work and improve their learning. This action may undermine the teachers' position (Sadler, 1989). Nevertheless, teachers need to encourage students to participate in the learning process by assessing

their own performance to monitor and direct their learning since students' decision become more important to construct their knowledge and evaluate their learning (Sadler, 1989). In this regard, teachers would have a good attitude towards assessment and learning and think that learning is a shared responsibility inside classrooms (McCombs, 1998).

Formative assessment is very important to develop the learning process. Effective assessment is integral to English teaching and learning classes (James & Pedder, 2006). Although assessment is assessment; it is supposed to achieve main purposes, namely empowers students to receive feedback on their own work and give them confidence in their own learning. Formative and summative assessment depends mainly on making a judgement and feedback about student performance. Both forms are crucial to the success of the student learning.

The literature of assessment in theory and practice incorporated the process of both summative and formative assessment, their function and the very close relationship between them in the enhancement of the teaching and learning quality (Taras, 2005; 2007a). However, since the meaning of 'formative assessment' is not clear enough, teachers and students need to draw a distinction between the two forms (Black and Wiliam, 1998). According to Ecclestone (2002: 43), formative assessment is relating to classroom activities and it would "lead naturally" into the requirements of summative assessment" (Ecclestone, 2002: 43). Moreover, assessment for learning helps teachers to rethink again and again about student learning and their roles in the classroom (James, 2006). The use of summative assessment just for grading seems doesn't make sense. But both summative and formative assessment are required to enhance classroom learning (James, 1998). Formative assessment is intended to support critical reflection and create good education. Ecclestone (2002: 40) argued that formative assessment

activities help in linking between autonomy and motivation for learning (see also Blanche, 1988). Ecclestone (2002) and Brophy (2004) appreciated the role of intrinsic motivation in developing the skills of meta-cognition and reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of one's own learning. Motivation may help learners to become more active, and then they can participate in the classroom activities. Subsequently, their learning responsibility which results from such participation may increase their confidence and motivation that leads to an effective and essential learning (see Benson, 2001; Finch, 2007; Watkins et al, 2007).

Assessment for learning can lead to a significant improvement in student work (Cowan, 2006). To achieve these goals and get better education, student self-assessment which is a strategy of formative assessment needs to be employed in the classroom (James, 2006: 58). And Bould (1991, 1995) stated that formative practices can be used as key components of the self-assessment process that improves student learning. A considerable shift, therefore, from the teaching perspective to student learning centrality is more required (Boud, 1995). This is because formative assessment principles are related to learning and teaching context (Taras, 2010: 199).

Ecclestone (1996) confirmed that the focus of the shift need to be from just measuring and diagnosing student learning to implementing assessment that could set goals and check learning progress. The emphasis is very much on diagnosing learners' learning needs, and making a great progress in the learning situation (Ecclestone, 1996). Assessment should increase self-learning and support critical thinking (Gipps, 1994).

Taras (2001, 2002, 2003) & Brown (2005) stated that self-assessment has a major role in developing the student learning in the classroom mainly because a student has had to make certain decisions whether he/she does well or not. Using student self-assessment would shift the focus of classroom

teaching towards student learning by creating a climate of opinion on self-assessment (Ross, 2006). Hence, a complete change in classroom culture is required by teachers. More importantly, the use of student self-assessment in the classroom, particularly in Libyan classrooms would involve students in the learning process and then they improve their own learning since self-assessment seems to be more combatable with communicative principles (Geeslin, 2003: 859). Besides, the implementation of this approach in Libyan classrooms requires the use of student self-assessment since the use of learner-centred teaching requires that students need to do self-assessment (Shihiba, 2011: 87). However, Dalala (2014) came to the conclusion that there was a general belief that EFL teachers had strongly supported the role of self-assessment in student learning. However, there was a mismatch between their belief and the implementation of this strategy in Libyan secondary schools.

Nonetheless, there had been much debate on the issue of enhancing learning through such assessment forms because self-assessment is required for improving student work and making learning happens. Oskarsson (1998: 3-4) recommended the use of self-assessment to (1) enhance student learning, (2) increase awareness of learning, (3) set and achieve goals, (4) master the assessment processes, (5) engage students in their own learning and (6) create and supporting learning.

The need to raise standards of achievement in assessment and learning requires that teachers need to think that learning is mainly the responsibility of students themselves. In other words, learners would take a decision to work towards a goal that makes them to be more involved in their own education in order to improve their ability. Therefore, in order to involve students in their own learning and make them actually aware of the difficulties they face, EFL Libyan teachers would shift their views from centred teaching view to learner-centred



classroom and use formative assessment strategies, namely self-assessment which is compatible with the implementation of communicative language teaching and its principles to improve student knowledge and develop learning skills in the classroom. In addition, they need to take a more optimistic view that students need to do self-assessment which involves both assessment practices such as discussing assessment criteria and comparing it with the standard as well as learning activities like receiving and providing constructive feedback after doing self-assessment and giving summative grades. Finally, EFL teachers would believe in making a very positive contribution to the success of assessment and learning in order to develop student learning skills.

Summative Assessment (assessment of learning)

According to Irons (2008: 7) summative assessment is “any assessment activity, which results in a mark or grade which is subsequently used as a judgement on student performance”. Torrance and Pryor (1998: 8) explained that summative assessment is generally conducted at the end of a course of education to measure student performance for purpose of grading. Sadler (1989) explained that there is some difference between summative assessment and formative assessment. “Summative assessment contrasts with formative assessment in that summative assessment is concerned with summing up or summarizing the achievement status of a student, and is geared towards reporting at the end of a course of study, especially for the purposes of certification” (p: 120). Moreover, Brook (2004) argued that formative assessment takes place during a course of study while summative assessment is undertaken at the end of a learning course or programme. Eccleton (1996) pointed out that this form of assessment is used for examinations, tests and marks and formative assessment is intended for students to involve them in learning and improve their own work. In short, summative assessment excludes students from learning and it is just

limited to certification and accountability. But formative assessment includes students as active participants in the learning process. Dalala (2014: 297) stated that “summative assessment cannot improve students' performance and identify students' learning needs and accomplish their own goals. This form of assessment would not be used to involve students in their own learning”.

Subsequently, there had been much debate on the big issue of “the paradigm shift witnessed in education; we believe that the move away from summative ways of assessment to formative assessment could lead to students' better understanding of the process of how to learn rather than what is expected to be learnt.” (Westlake and Zitko, 2010: 7). However, summative assessment seems to be essential for formative assessment to make a judgement. “It is possible for assessment to be uniquely summative where the assessment stops at the judgement. However, it is not possible for assessment to be uniquely formative without the summative judgement having preceded it” (Taras, 2005:: 468).

Although, summative assessment is of vital process for using the formative assessment principles that refers to tasks or activities that need constructive feedback to improve students' learning and increase their motivation and interaction in the classroom. Actually, in order for summative assessment to be formative and would be effective and more useful to improve student learning, it needs feedback that identifies a gap between the actual performance being assessed and the required standard to be achieved. As mentioned above, summative assessment without formative assessment does not make sense.

Finally, in effect, having the benefit of a good education, teachers need to give summative grades to students after receiving and discussing formative feedback. As a result, the decision – makers in education including EFL teachers and school inspectors need to change their belief towards

assessment and learning and move away from summative assessment to formative assessment strategies to empower student learning and give them a chance to participate in the learning process.

Formative Assessment (assessment for learning)

As mentioned earlier, assessment is of vital importance in learning. Formative assessment is very essential for a teacher classroom work to make learning happen and improve EFL learner performance. Leahy and Wiliam (2012) mentioned that evidence for formative assessment power in improving student performance has been increasing steadily over the last of quarter of a century. Formative Assessment has a strong influence on teachers' classroom work as well as on taking students' learning forward (Black and Wiliam, 2012: 11). From this, it is clear that this form of assessment is related to the teacher work that encourages and enhances student ability in the classroom (Black, 1986). It was claimed that assessment for learning encourages students to take their own responsibility for ensuring their learning. For example, Wiliam & Marshall (2002) argue that "formative assessment is all those things that teachers and students do together that help the teachers know where the learners are when they are learning and what they need to do to improve and how to go about it" (p: 47). This form of assessment would be useful for improving teaching and learning methods. Assessment for learning is used to improve one's performance and identify strengths and weaknesses after receiving teacher feedback.

Formative assessment feedback given by the teacher is very necessary for making a notable change that helps students to achieve their learning goals and check their own progress (Irons, 2008). In this regard, students may have a chance to be aware of their weakness and strengths. Then, they may interact with their teachers and colleagues to improve their own work. Accordingly, they have and develop a wide knowledge and collect relevant information about their own work. Moreover,

students may become more independent of their teachers through formative assessment practices.

Students may increase their motivation for learning and make a possible learning atmosphere to create a social context in the classroom through formative assessment activities (Black and Wiliam 1998). "Formative assessment is encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (Black & Wiliam, 1998: 2).

Besides, the involvement of students in their learning could take place when they have the opportunity for discussing the assessment criteria, comparing their work to the agreed criteria, receiving continuing feedback when using formative assessment inside classrooms. Formative assessment is therefore, very essential for effective learning that would be diagnosed and enhanced through providing feedback (Ecclestone, 2007: 13). She confirmed that this form of assessment is used to make learners familiar with their abilities and learning outcomes, to provide constructive feedback, to check progress and accomplishments, to motivate learners and monitor their own learning. "Formative assessment has to encourage critical reflection and engagement with dilemmas in subject disciplines, social and occupationally related issued. Oral and written 'critical conversations' should encourage learners to assess their own work and relate its quality to that of peers and immediate superiors" (Ecclestone, 2002: 40).

Above all, it was very clear that the role of formative assessment is to give students more power over their learning. However, formative assessment may not help students to become independent of their teachers. Thus, it is very important to use formative assessment strategies such as self-assessment which increases the student awareness and meets their demand for further education aiming that students would become more independent of their teachers. This requires that

students need to be involved in the learning process and improve their own work through the teacher feedback and the interaction between the students and their teacher in the classroom. EFL teachers, therefore, need to deal with these aspects in their classrooms to encourage students to learn language authentically through classroom interactions and communication skills instead of memorizing lessons, taking dictation and/or receiving knowledge without active participation in its construction. Finally, formative assessment strategies like peer- and/or - self-assessment strategies become required to support English language learning in classrooms.

#### Pedagogical Implications

In the light of understanding and implementing curriculum innovations, it would be suggested that the content of this study is relevant to developing English language assessment and its learning in Libyan classroom contexts. The implementation of these innovations is important for teachers to understand the principles and practices of language assessment proposed changes. It was proposed that teachers need to consider their own way of teaching to grant students active role and enhance their learning through formative assessment practices in the classroom. A solution immediately suggested for teachers to deal with pedagogical implications of the formative assessment processes, namely establishing assessment criteria and providing assessment feedback to emphasize the development of students' communicative language learning skills. On this basis, in the light of further research, implementing self-assessment - a principle of formative assessment – a recent innovation in a new communicative English language curriculum in Libyan context is highly recommended.

#### **Summary and Conclusion**

Instead of using traditional teaching methods dealing with specific students' needs such as recitation and memorization of

vocabularies from memory and learning certain grammatical rules, teachers need to support students by developing their intellectual capacity, encouraging their creativity, stimulating discussions among them to deal with the subject in more details and encourage their learning independence. EFL teachers need to help their students to build intellectual knowledge by adopting better creative skills and selecting alternative methods of analysis, conclusion, and construction of knowledge. And, they need to think to look for a better understanding through the assessment of their own work and the participation in the classroom activities. Further, students need to collect information used for decision-making and scientific solutions to solve their problems. This ensures that students need to be involved in the learning process and a smooth transition from summative assessment to formative assessment prospective becomes essential and more required. Finally, it is important for teachers and students to use the formative assessment process pertaining to summative assessment, excluding the purpose of certification.

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