

## Assessment of English as a Foreign Language in Libyan Universities

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### التقييم العلمي وتدریس اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات الليبية

عملية التقييم والبحث فيها ليست بالمهمة السهلة و ذلك لأهميتها في الرقي بالعملية التعليمية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى التعريف بالتقييم العلمي وأنواعه، وطرقه، وأهميته، فيما يتعلق بتعليم اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات الليبية. فكثيرا من الناس يلقون اللوم علي المؤسسات الحكومية، والقوانين المتعلقة بالجامعات. وكذلك الإمكانيات المتاحة والطلاب ويتجاهلون الأساتذة الذين يمثلون السبب الرئيسي في انجاز العملية التعليمية علي أكمل وجه، ولذلك تناول الباحث هذه المشكلة واستعمل فيها الطريقة التي تهدف جمع بيانات قيمة عن طريق المقابلات الشخصية مع بعض أساتذة اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الزاوية، وجامعة طرابلس. حيث اوجد الباحث بان الأساتذة لم يطبقون عملية التقييم بالطرق الصحيحة والمطلوبة، وذلك نتيجة لعدم وجود لائحة واضحة متخصصة لكل مادة في هذا المجال، حتى يتسنى لهم التعامل معها بوضوح وبشفافية تامة. وقد أثبتت النتائج كذلك بان هناك العديد من العراقيل التي تعيق الأساتذة في انجاز العملية التقييمية التي تهدف للرفع من المستوى التعليمي للطلاب. كذلك أوصت الدراسة ببعض التوصيات التي من الممكن أن يستفيد منها الكثيرين في هذا المجال.

### **Abstract**

Conducting research on assessment is not easy, as assessment is a widely variable and significant process. This research aims to find out what assessment is, and how it might be employed for improvement of the teaching and learning process. It is common for people in Libyan context to blame students, curricula and education authority policies for poor performance in learning English, and ignore the teacher's assessment. They believe that teachers with high qualifications can not make any mistakes at all, when students fail to pass their course. This ignores the reality that problems sometimes come from the teachers themselves, when they assess their students. Qualitative research method interview was used. The findings revealed that there are many constraints which make assessment problematic. It was also confirmed that most teachers do not present the whole range of strategies in the correct way. The reason was that, there is no clear and unified policy to use the same assessment methods in Libyan universities. This study provided some recommendations which may lead to

improve learning techniques through the proposed assessment strategies.

### **1. Introduction**

In each area of life there is a number of tools that are used for serving its own field of activity. The education sector, for example, has some of these, and assessment is one of the most important. Duschl (2003) pointed out that assessment is regarded as the heart of both the teaching and learning processes. In contrast, assessment can be defined as “a systematic gathering of information for the purposes of making decisions or judgments about individuals” (Lynch, 2002: 358). All of these definitions confirmed the value of assessment especially in teaching and learning English. Therefore, this study attempts to find ways to help the teachers to improve their methods and strategies for assessing their students. It also addresses the need for learners to improve their learning process. This is done by gathering their views regarding the need for improvement.

By carrying out this research, it might be useful for teachers and supervisors in implementing changes to the curriculum.

By proposing some alternative means for the improvement

of assessment, this paper will help learners to overcome some of the difficulties in learning, because by assessing and analyzing the performance of teachers of English in universities the researcher has been able to come up with some new ideas for improving assessment. Educators, especially those specialised in teaching second languages, might benefit from this study as it proposes effective measures for the curriculum that will make it more likely to achieve success among the learners.

## **2. Assessment and its Types**

Commonly, educational writers such as Harris and McCann (1994) classify assessment types according to their formality and informality. Assessment is seen as formal when it employs tests for assessing students, and informal when other tools are used such as observation (James, 1998). However, Harris and McCann's classification will be dealt with as being more familiar than James's: Informal assessment is described by Harris and McCann (1994:5) as "a way of collecting information about our students' performance in normal classroom conditions". This means that teachers can assess their students informally, without

the students feeling that they are being assessed. For example, a teacher may assess how his or her students speak, write or read. Informal assessment may be continuous during the teaching and learning process. Harris and McCann (1994) argue that when carrying out informal assessment, there are three factors that should be taken into consideration. These are:

- What is to be assessed has to be decided first.
- For assessing students, rough impressions should not be relied upon but clear criteria must be established.
- Linkage between this assessment and other types, such as formal and self assessment, is significant.

However, formal assessment is a contrast and complementary to informal assessment, and is conducted by means of examinations or tests as described by Harris and McCann (1994). On the other hand, they are similar in that both seek to gather information about students so that further action may be taken by the assessing agent. One way of administering formal assessment is by using tests (Duschl, 2003). They also mentioned that testing includes a range of types, such as summative tests, placement tests and

diagnostic tests. All of these are carried out by teachers in order to collect information about the teaching and learning process.

### **3. The Purposes of Assessment**

Assessment is meant to monitor and keep track of students' progress as well as the teaching process, so it is undertaken to fulfil different purposes. According to Hedge (2000), one of these purposes is that formative assessment by teachers may make use of any information that has been gained about their students' progress as a basis for any future procedures aiming to support students' learning. On this point, Orpwood (2001) states that teachers employ such information for making decisions about their students. In other words this type of assessment, as Broughton et al (1980) argue, investigates whether students have learned what has been taught to them, or not. If they have, this means that the teaching process has been effective; and vice versa.

Generally speaking, formative assessment is carried out for students so that they can be informed about their positive achievements as well as their weaknesses, in order to be

advised or directed about what they need to do for better learning. Teachers can also use formative assessment as a means of judging the effectiveness of their teaching. This type of assessment is not carried out at a certain point in time, as is the case for some other types, but is an ongoing process which may be conducted as Sutton (1992:3) states “every few minutes”. He also adds that “without formative assessment teachers could not function effectively.”

A further type of assessment is, as Hedge (2000:376) points out, assessment to measure what learners have achieved. This type is referred to as summative assessment. The main use of this type is to record or summarise the outcomes and overall achievements of learners at a certain point in time, such as the middle or end of term or end of the year. This recording is usually done in a systematic way. Jones et al (1986) point out that summative assessment usually serves other parties, rather than students and teachers. These parties could be schools, employment institutions, parents and others.

Satterly (1989) describe another type of assessment, diagnostic assessment, through which teachers can identify

learning difficulties and classify them so that proper remedial assistance and guidance can be provided to the learners. These difficulties should be classified so that appropriate solutions can be found. Diagnostic assessment, as Gipps (1990) states, is concerned with identifying the weaknesses of learners, in other words, what they are not able to do as the result of some problem which is hindering their progress. These problems could be related to the students themselves, such as psychological or other personal reasons, or they may be related to some aspect of teaching, the curriculum or another element affecting their education. Therefore, "the student should be able to become both responsible and self-sufficient in learning and not dependent on the teacher's guidance" (Taras, 2001: 609).

A further purpose of assessment is in selecting students to be transferred from one level to another. This is called placement assessment, and for this type students usually have to take written examinations. The exams are not set by classroom teachers, but by external agents. These agents could be school administration or educational authorities. However, in some countries such as Libya, classroom

teachers are responsible for setting all levels in universities and do not use placement assessment because unlike the practice in UK universities, most universities in Libya do not deal with external agents.

#### **4. Strategies of Assessment**

In carrying out any type of assessment with the aim of getting specific feedback for teachers or students, assessing agents such as teachers or educational authorities should use the appropriate strategy to obtain useful information. In the research conducted by Taras (2001) into classroom assessment techniques, She argued that teachers (who are responsible for most assessment) should take the utmost care when selecting a strategy to be used for collecting information about students, because each procedure will work in some situations but not in others. For example, tests are not useful when assessing learners' attitude; but another strategy, observation, can help to fulfil that task. According to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (1996), there are a number of assessment strategies that focus on assisting students in their learning process. Here are some of them:

#### **4.1. Tests as assessment strategy**

A test is a method of assessing learners which will certainly be used by classroom teachers. A test is defined as a short, quick, teacher-devised activity carried out in the classroom, and used by the teacher as the basis of ongoing assessment (James, 2006). Therefore, according to this definition teachers can test their students after each lesson to see how well they have understood. Many different types of tests are used in the educational sector; comprehension, true-false tests and so on. These tests usually serve to provide teachers with information about the learners' progress. Teachers in Libyan universities always run tests, because they want to know how their courses have influenced the students' learning and what they have achieved. In addition, they use tests because they want to know if their teaching has any weaknesses; teachers will sometimes be unaware of their own weak points until they assess their students.

#### **4.2. Observation as Assessment Strategy**

Observation is another assessment method for classroom teachers to assess students informally. Harris and McCann (1994) point out that information about students'

performance can be collected by teachers in ordinary classroom situations without setting any tests for formal assessment. This method is normally used to assess the students' attitude towards certain points that are being taught, as well as their skills (Black & Wiliam, 2006). It could be said that observation is effective as an assessment method when other strategies are not; for example, it can be used when a teacher wants to know how students behave when solving problems, or how effectively they work together to complete a given task. Moreover, observation may also tell teachers what the next step should be: whether to go forward, or if they need to revise certain points first because the students have not understood them (Bryman, 2001).

#### **4.3. Interview as Assessment Strategy**

Interview is another assessment method that class teachers or other assessing agents can use to gather information about their students. This can be used when other strategies, such as testing, do not work. For instance, teachers can conduct interviews to obtain a better idea about students' thinking or their level of understanding, their ability to

communicate or to apply the concepts they have learned. In addition, Cohen, et al., (2007) argues that interviews can also provide more information about particular students such as those who suffer from psychological problems that may hinder their learning process.

### **5. Methodology**

This section discusses the available research method for this study, and that was appropriate for it. Likewise, it describes the implementation of the research, the measurements and how the relevant findings were made. This study employed qualitative research method, since this research set out to explain the relationship through qualitative elements in the research. These qualitative elements do not have standard measures, since they are about behaviour, attitudes, opinions and beliefs. Qualitative approaches focus on the way in which people construct their social actions. Weir and Roberts (1994:159) stated that "qualitative methods are often associated with naturalistic inductive designs and are guided by a search for patterns rather than hypotheses". This means that qualitative researchers study things in their

natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

### **5.1. Research question**

- How is English as a foreign language assessed in Libyan Universities?

### **5.2. Interviews with teachers**

This study was primarily accomplished by conducting personal semi-structured interviews (with classroom teachers as a data collection, in which they were asked several questions in English, related to the subject under investigation. The reason for using this type of interview was to obtain qualitative data. The researcher used semi-structured interviews with teachers to collect data from the participations. The paper is a case study undertaken in the English departments in different universities (Zawia and Tripoli). Four teachers were chosen randomly from each university to be interviewed.

Interviewing has been widely used as a source of data collection. Cohen et al (2007) claim that a research interview can serve three objectives. First, it may be used as the main method of data collection; second, it may be used

for examining hypotheses or suggesting new ones, or as a tool to help identify factors and relationships; third, it may be used to accompany other research methods. The interviewer can omit, modify and add questions in an interview if the questions they have seem inappropriate for the interviewees. Bryman mentions that semi-structured interview refers to “a context in which the interviewer has a series of question that are in the general form of interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies” (2001: 110). Furthermore, one of the advantages of an interview also is that the interviewees’ responses can be clarified and developed through follow-up questioning (Weir & Roberts, 1994). The interviewer is able to explore comments and develop issues.

### **5.2.1 Reliability and validity of interviews**

The purpose of using semi-structured interviews in this study was to identify how teachers of English as a foreign language assess their students in Libyan universities. The flexibility of this method was the main reason behind

adopting it. Considering qualitative validity is essential, and is “addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of data achieved, the participants approached, [and] the extent of triangulation” (Cohen et al., 2007: 133). Therefore, I did my utmost to consider all precautions to maximise the validity of the interviews. The questions in the interviews were carefully constructed to be concise and to guarantee full understanding. The questions were given to colleagues who have good experience in teaching English in the context researched. The feedback gained helped the researcher to modify some of the questions.

Reliability in qualitative research "can be regarded as a fit between what researchers recorded and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched" (Cohen, et al., 2007: 149). It is necessary to consider the reliability of the interviews conducted. The reliability of the interviews data in this research was approached through the transparency and honesty in providing detailed mental picture of the interviews in terms of creating the interview questions asked. The reliability and validity of an interview depends on various factors, such as the interviewer’s personality,

experience and ability to conduct and record the interview (Bryman, 2001).

## **6. Analysis**

While conducting this research, by using qualitative method such as interview, a large amount of data has been collected. "Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992:127). Therefore, The data has been analysed in order to provide appropriate answers to the principal question in this research. The data was collected from eight teachers in different universities. They were very cooperative when I asked them to take part in my interviews. All of the interviews were transcribed. For each question I have tried to summarise the respondents' answers in order to come up with a summary of their responses.

**Q1. Do you think that assessment training sessions would help you in your teaching? If yes, how, and if not, why not?**

**Table 1: The impact of assessment training sessions on teachers' teaching**

No.	Responses	Number of teachers
1	Yes, I agree with this.	7
2	No, I do not agree with this.	1
<b>Total</b>	//	8

From the above table it can be seen that 7 teachers (A, B, D, E, F, G, and H) thought that training sessions would help them in their teaching, while one teacher disagreed.

### **Summary of positive responses**

- They think that training for assessment would be useful. It would help them in that they would learn from other experienced, professional teachers during the assessment training sessions. Good training sessions with enhanced guidelines can improve the teachers' ability and awareness of what assessment is about. Of course a good teacher is able to adopt new methods of assessment, and in that way the assessment can produce positive consequences. (Teachers A, F and H).
- Yes. They would certainly help teachers to organize and check their performance, and the quality and quantity of the work they have done with their students. (Teacher D).
- Training sessions will show teachers how the difficulties encountered by learners can be solved. (Teacher E).

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- Training sessions provide teachers with a good idea about the types of assessment and their application. (Teacher B).
- We have a lack of expertise in our university, so we need training sessions from time to time. (Teacher G).

#### **Summary of negative responses**

- No. because eight years of experience have provided me with sufficient skills in the area. (Teacher C).

#### **Q2. Do you think that the educational authorities give assessment any importance? If yes, how?**

**Table 2: The importance given to assessment by the educational authorities**

No.	Responses	Number of respondents
1	yes, I agree with this.	3
2	yes, I agree but not always.	1
3	no, I do not agree with this.	4

From the above table it may be seen that the teachers C, G and H think that the educational authorities give importance to the assessment process. On the other hand, teacher D believes that they do give it some importance but not regularly. Teachers A, B, E and F believe that the

educational authorities do not give any importance to the assessment process.

### **Summary of positive responses**

- The education authorities seem to follow systematic procedures from age 6 onwards. (Teacher C).
- They follow the students' level. (Teacher G)
- The educational authorities set goals to be achieved. (Teacher H)

### **Summary of neither negative nor positive responses**

- The educational authorities do not give assessment much consideration, unless some information is required by a higher authority. (Teacher D)

### **Summary of negative responses**

These responses were given by four teachers, A, B, E and F. They think that importance is not given to assessment because:

- The educational authorities do not seem to give much importance to assessment, and they think that the only method used for assessment is to follow the usual route of tests, quizzes and examinations. The traditional way is still used. (Teachers A and B).

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- Such authorities do not conduct any training sessions for teachers. (Teacher E).
- The assessment policy in universities is not effective; however nothing is done to make improvements. (Teacher F).

**Q3. If we assume that students are weak in English, do you think that it has something to do with assessment?**

The responses are shown in the table below.

**Table 3: The relationship between assessment and students' weakness in English**

No.	Responses	Number of respondents
1	Yes, I agree with this.	6
2	No, I do not agree with this.	2

This table above shows that most of the teachers, A, B, C, D, E and G, saw some correlation between students' weakness in English and the assessment process. Only teachers F and H think differently.

#### **Summary of positive responses**

- Because of teachers' ignorance about assessment types and how they may be applied. (Teacher E).

- Of course it has something to do with assessment, because without assessment teachers cannot identify their students' weaknesses. (Teacher D).
- Teachers think negative and positive assessment can influence the teaching process. The course book and the test methods also can influence the teaching process. In addition, the inexperienced teacher may have poor performance in class. The way in which the test is written and prepared can also influence the students. (Teachers A, B and C).
- Because without assessment, students can not be improved. (Teacher G).

#### **Summary of negative responses**

- Assessment is not everything but just one factor, weakness is due to students' neglect of their studies. (Teacher F).
- Teachers think that such weakness is related to the difficulty of the English curriculum. (Teacher H).

**Q4. What procedures do you follow for keeping assessment records?**

- Assessment records are kept in their own notebooks. They should be kept confidential. (Teachers C, D, G, E, F and H).
- We put them in filing cabinets or in a new computer database. They should be kept confidential. (Teacher A).
- They should be kept confidential, and only the tutors or teachers can see the performance of students in their previous course. (Teacher B).

**Q5. What types of assessment do you use as a teacher?**

**(1) formative (2) summative (3) diagnostic (4) placement.**

- All Teachers use formative assessment.
- Summative assessment was used only by teachers 'A, B, C, D'.
- Diagnostic assessment was used by only teachers 'E, F, G and H'.
- None of the teachers used placement assessment.

- Q6. Do you encounter any difficulties when you provide assistance to students who need it? If yes, what are they?
- From the summary of the interviews results it can be seen that all of the teachers, A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H, encounter some difficulties.

These difficulties are as follows:

- Generally the classes at universities are full, and some classes contain over forty students. This makes assistance and the delivery of information difficult. They cannot make contact with every student individually. (Teachers A, B and G).
- Lack of teaching aids in universities. (Teacher E).
- Not enough time for one-to-one tuition with individual students. (Teacher C).
- It depends on the level of the students. Some students need a great deal of help, and others are just coping with the lectures. (Teacher D).
- Students' bad attitude towards English. (Teachers F and H).

**Q7. Why do you assess your students?**

The following table presents teachers' responses.

**Table 4: Teacher's purposes when assessing their students**

Teachers	Purpose1	Purpose 2	Purpose 3
1	To improve students' knowledge and awareness.	Improve exam structure.	To know what they have achieved at the end of each exam.
2	Get feedback from students about their progress.	Expand insights into students' skill progress	Set of questions helps students to raise their awareness.
3	To determine students' level after the exams.	Ameliorate the difficult parts they face.	To monitor students' development.
4	To determine students' level after each exam.	Because I want to know how much progress they have made.	To help them to become better learners.
5	To know what achievements they have made.	To ameliorate the difficult parts they face.	To enhance and develop their progress.
6	To improve students' understanding.	To help and support students with their weakest skills.	To know whether they are coping with the syllabus or not.

7	To know the level of students.	To focus on the weakness and improve it in the future.	To change my methods of teaching.
8	To check student's performance	To evaluate the materials and improve it.	To choose the right subject to teach according to the students' level.

**Q8. What assessment strategies do you use, and how often?**

The results revealed that there are some teachers who *sometimes* use test strategy (Teachers A and B), while none of them uses it *every lesson*. All the teachers also said that they test their students *usually*, while none has not used this strategy. Secondly, observation strategy is used in *every lesson* by (Teacher C) while (Teachers D, E, F and G) *usually* use it. Thirdly, interview strategy is not used *every lesson* and generally it is not used. However, some of them have used it *sometimes*. Finally, there are some teachers who mentioned some other types of assessment, such as work book and class exercises, or listening exercises such as (Teachers A, B, C, E, F)

**Q9.What do you think the University's assessment policy should be?**

The analysis of data revealed that teachers A, B, D, E, F, G and H believe that the current policy should be changed, while teacher C does not agree.

**Summary of positive responses:**

- The university assessment policy should use whatever methods might improve students' learning awareness and ability. In addition, correct and positive assessment will improve the teaching and learning process. (Teachers A and B).
- Assessment should be undertaken regularly, and any failure of an entire course or class should be investigated carefully. This will provide teachers and educational authorities with the information needed to improve or change the syllabus, and to find out the main reasons for that failure. (Teacher D).
- Assessment policy should be changed, giving teachers the opportunity to apply all types of assessment instead of just one or two. (Teacher E).

- It should be changed by training teachers in assessment. (Teachers F and H).
- It should be changed by setting monthly and daily oral tests for students. (Teacher G).

**Summary of negative responses:**

- Assessment policy will not change, because the current system seems to be working well. (Teacher C).

**Q10. How do you see assessment as a way of improving the educational process?**

- It improves the teacher's method of setting exams, and selecting the way to tackle the subjects and syllabus. This influences the students' performance, so it develops their study. (Teacher A).
- When there is good assessment there is good improvement. Good assessment means positive results. It improves the whole education system. (Teacher B).
- By carefully assessing students' attainments in general English subjects such as Grammar, Phonology and Morphology. (Teacher C).
- It is very important, because it shows the quantity and quality of work produced by students. It also shows

whether the subject materials are working properly or whether they should be replaced, modified or changed. (Teacher D)

- It helps teachers to adopt appropriate teaching methods. (Teacher E).
- It helps teachers to identify their students' weaknesses and to know how well their students are progressing. (Teachers F and H).
- It helps students to learn. (Teacher G).

### **7. Discussion of the Main Results of the Research**

This section presents the discussion of the main findings of the interviews conducted with eight teachers. The respondents were all from universities in Libya. The first main point concerns the nature of assessment. As shown in the results, the teachers tend to rely on the summative method and ignore the use of placement assessment, i.e. external examiners, in their universities. In addition, most teachers do not use formative assessment either, although it would be helpful for them to change their curriculum from time to time using the students' feedback to improve their courses, and encourage students to take a positive attitude

towards the assessment process. This was stressed by Sutton (1992:3) who suggested that formative assessment could be conducted “every few minutes”. Therefore, formative assessment is very important, and should be ongoing.

Furthermore, concerning diagnostic assessment and how it is carried out, the results revealed that most of the teachers do not conduct this type of assessment. This is not in line with Gipps (1990) who stated that using diagnostic assessment is essential because it leads to identify the weaknesses of learners during teaching progresses. In fact, diagnostic assessment would be extremely valuable in Libyan universities, because it helps to identify difficulties being encountered by students. It is apparent that teachers do not conduct such assessment despite being aware of their students’ learning problems with English. The reason underlying this could be related to their ignorance about the various types of assessment and why they are important. Problems with learning English will continue unless classroom teachers become more conscious of the range of assessment types. These weaknesses are all due to the lack

of teacher training in assessment. Such differences do not positively serve the educational process.

The third main point of focus is the strategies for assessment because, as the results of the teachers' interviews have shown, each strategy is used in a different way and to a different degree. These teachers seems agree with Taras (2001) when she argued that teachers should take the utmost care when selecting a strategy to be used for collecting information about students, because each procedure will work in some situations but not in others. Therefore, it may be stated that teachers are under no requirement to use those strategies when they assess their students in the university. In general, the results showed that tests and observation are used more than other strategies, and they use them both usually and most of the time. The reason for these two strategies being used widely might be because the teaching conditions in these universities are not suitable for the use of other strategies. I believe teachers have not enough understanding of their alternatives, while the large numbers of students in each class and the lack of teaching aids in

universities, are all contributory reasons to explain why teachers do not apply other strategies.

The fourth main point based on interview findings is related to assessment policy. Most of the teachers (A, B, D, E, F, G and H) believe and hope the policy will be changed, because it does not help them in some aspects of their work. For instance, concerning assessment training for teachers, the findings revealed by the teachers' questionnaire show that none of the teachers had received any such training. This means that the educational authorities and teacher training institutions are not fulfilling their responsibility to train teachers properly. The implication of this is that education authorities and teacher training institutions should emphasise the need for teachers to be trained in assessment because assessment is important for teaching and learning English language (Hedge, 2000).

This neglect of assessment training has resulted in lack of uniformity in conducting assessment, as seen in the fact that teachers do not undertake assessment in a way that corresponds with their colleagues. For instance, some teachers assess their students twice a year while other

teachers do so three times a year, as both students and teachers mentioned. The educational authorities do not place much importance on assessment, and the only method used is the usual round of tests, quizzes and exams. This traditional way is still the one most commonly used. Assessment policy in universities is not effective; however nothing is being done to improve things, as the teachers (A, B and F) stated in interview question 2. I believe the reason is that the educational authorities believe that teachers in universities, being highly qualified do not need any more training in education, but that is a wrong idea. On the other hand, Teacher C answered most of the interview questions in a way that was noticeably different from the other teachers. For instance, C said that “assessment policy will not change, because the current system seems to work well”. It might do so for him, given his experience but it is not an acceptable reason, because learning is never finished. The last main point to note is that all the teachers agreed about the significance of assessment in the learning process. They stated that assessment is very important for student learning, and for the teachers themselves. This is in line

with Hedge (2000) who considered the purposes of assessment is to use of information that help students' progress as a basis for any future procedures aiming to support students' learning. However, the answers to some questions do not say that. For instance, teachers sometimes ignore certain types or strategies of assessment or are unaware of how to use them correctly. Teachers may not do what they hope, because of the college rules or the lack of teaching aids in their university.

Although universities have rules that teachers are expected to follow when they assess their students, most of the time they are not used. From my own experience as a teacher in the English department of a university, students should be assessed by two mid-term exams and a final exam at the end of the year, or possibly one mid-term exam and final exam, depending on the subject; whether Listening, Reading, Speaking or Writing. However, I believe teachers provide assessment based on their own opinions and taking account of the particular circumstances in their own university.

## **8. Conclusion**

According to the results of this research, there are many constraints which make assessment problematic. How can teachers teach and assess the four skills, without the necessary facilities? When teaching listening, for example, it is difficult to examine the students if there is no language laboratory in the university to practise this skill. However, students still require assessment from time to time to find out what they know and what they need. Furthermore, in relation to assessment training for teachers, it was found that none of them had received any training in their universities. At the same time, the universities are not taking any steps to cover this serious deficiency by arranging training sessions for teachers. This has led most teachers, especially those with relatively short working experience, to pay little attention to assessment despite their belief in its importance. Furthermore, teachers in universities seem to have a choice of which strategies to use according to their own preferences or the prevailing circumstances, although their departments have rules they should follow. Tests are most likely to be used for assessing students, compared with other

strategies. On the other hand, the findings indicate that the way assessment records are kept is the same in all universities: the teachers are responsible for keeping their own written or computerised notes, with a copy submitted to the university administration.

In addition, summative assessment is used by most teachers, rather than other types. Diagnostic and formative assessment types are predominantly recommended for teachers. The purpose of formative assessment is to improve the quality of students' learning, and it should not be evaluative or involve grading students. In addition diagnostic assessment is very important because it reveals what students need to learn. The results also have shown that when students cannot pass their exams the reason in many cases could be the misuse of assessment, because most teachers do not conduct the whole range of strategies in the correct way. For instance, some teachers could not differentiate between a spoken and a written English exam where the examiner asks the students to show their knowledge of "spoken English" through writing).

## **9. Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing findings, universities in Libya should provide assessment training for their teachers from time to time. This would help eliminate the constraints which are related to assessment. In addition, English class sizes in small classrooms should be reduced wherever possible, because teachers can not fulfill their duties properly under the present arrangements. The English module is not the same as geography or history in the way that it is taught and assessed, and should not be dealt with as other modules if we want students to learn the language properly. It is recommended that more research be carried out on this subject, as a thorough investigation by which a more accurate picture might be obtained.

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