

Assessment in the schools of Kosovo

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Abstract

This research paper deals with assessment and the way students are being assessed in some schools in Kosovo. It analyses whether the English teachers are using summative assessment or formative assessment when it comes to assess students, or if they prefer to stick to their traditional ways of assessing, because formative and summative methods require more dedication than the traditional methods. The study was conducted on the assessment process of English teachers, who work and teach in different schools in Prizren.

The research includes twenty English teachers who differ on the basis of following criteria: their age, their teaching experience, education related to assessment, attended trainings related to the process of assessment, number of students in a class, opinions about the quality of the assessment process in their school and their attitudes towards modern methods, especially formative and summative assessment. Data has been collected qualitatively in the form of interviews and analyzed using content analyses (Silverman, 2005) and inferential statistics by comparing results.

The results have shown that there are significant differences in application and understanding of the importance of the formative and summative method of assessment.

The study has shown that, even though most of the teachers have claimed to give priority to formative assessment, it appears that summative assessment is still dominant and favored by the majority of the teachers.

Keywords: assessment, formative method, summative method, English teachers, student feedback.

Introduction

Not often is thought that by assessment we only mean giving grades and making different kinds of tests with the purpose of evaluating someone's knowledge, but assessment, in fact, means a lot more than this partial definition. Actually, assessment is the systematic collection of data review and use of information about educational program, in order to improve student's learning. It is a process of identification and discussion of information gathered from multiple and different sources for the purpose of developing deep understanding of what student's know, understand and what they can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experience. Assessment as a part of the teaching process is far more complex than it is thought to be. Negative effects coming out of not very good planned assessment can be far more serious than it is thought to be. According to Schwartz, P. and Webb G. (Assessment case students experience and practical from Higher educational, London 2002), assessment is not only central part of work for teachers, but also the main 'driver' of learning. That is to say, assessment is for teachers and students, to know not only how well they have done but also where they have done well and where

they need to make great efforts. Assessment is frequently divided into summative assessment and formative assessment. Application of formative assessment requires continual monitoring of students' development and progress, not only assessment of his knowledge at the end. This kind of assessment is qualitative, and covers all the aspects of students' development: intellectual, psycho-physical, social, emotional etc., the teacher is required to conduct pedagogical documentation where can be found details about lack student development. Summative assessment on the other hand is the kind of assessment that can be in a form of an exam, paper, final project etc, and has for a goal to evaluate students' learning at the end of a constructional unit or school semester.(Race, P. Brown, S. and Smith, B. 500 tips on assessment, 2nd edition). Generally saying testing is the basic way of summative assessment and usually teachers set a test at the end of the learning period in the other hand formative assessment involves the collecting of information or evidence of a learners' learning progress in the classroom. Today, we can freely say that teachers are able to implement various methods of assessment, as they attend different trainings and seminars related to them and the awareness of importance of mixing these methods, while assessing students with the ultimate goal of getting as accurate results of students' knowledge as possible. Firstly, the teacher must have positive attitudes, towards these others forms of assessing. They need to have, the will, creativity in their work, appropriate curriculum, as well as the school itself has to offer adequate conditions in order to be possible the proper implementation of formative and summative methods. If all activities are organized in a way to enable every single student to express himself, without any pressure we will be to discover the capabilities of every one of them and assess them in all the aspects of their development. So, it is important to add that this research is going to shed light on the way students are being assessed nowadays, are teachers using formative and summative assessment, what type of these assessments are beneficial to teaching and the good way for assessing their students.

Literature review

Why to assess? In answering this question, it deals not only with the purpose of assessment, but also the issues of who needs or uses the results. Biggs, J. B. (Teaching for quality learning at University society for research into high education and open university press, Buckingham 1999), pointed out the important distinction between formative and summative functions. The main purpose of summative assessment is to make a judgment regarding each student's performance. Students are marked at the end of a module, course or unit, so the results of such assessment are often presented in marks or grades. Summative judgments are also used to accredit learners at the end of programme. Falchikov, N.(Improving assessment through student involvement London, 2005).

Nevo, D. (School-based evaluation, A dialogue about school improvement, London, 1995) described these judgments as being for certification and diagnostic purpose. There is a critical thinking about summative assessment. Can test scores be used to inform us about our teaching and learning? He considered that the answer, not very much. Even if they can reveal some problems about our teaching or learning, it is

often too late to do anything about them, as it is already the end of a learning period. Different from summative assessment, formative assessment is based on information collected in the classroom work and the attention to improving its practice can enhance the learners' achievements. For example, English teachers ask students to write an essay, complete a research or give a speech in front of whole class. This kind of assessment will provide more information on students' learning during the learning process and will be useful for teachers to adjust their teaching according to students' needs and base teaching on the success or difficulties of students' learning. Formative assessment will be similar to activities that are often carried out in classroom. Students may develop their assessment tasks based on certain classroom activities, work out criteria to be followed when assessing students' performance, and do record keeping.

The issues involved here are summarized very briefly by Miller, A. Imrie, B. and Cox, K. (Student assessment in higher education, London, 1998). Formative assessment focuses on the process of learning, and gives students practice in essential skill such essay writing, problem solving. This type of assessment should be to provide regular feedback to students in order to stimulate learning (Miller, A. Imrie, B. and Cox, K. Student assessment in higher education, London, 1998) Harlen, W. (Assessment and learning differences and relationships between formative and summative assessment, London, 1997), states the relationship between assessment for formative and summative purpose. Teachers can use summative assessment evidence to help learning, and at the same time, using formative assessment information for summative assessment. It is both a weakness and a strength that summative assessment derived by interpreting formative evidence in a different way that both are in the hand of teacher.

Classroom assessment or teachers' assessment refers to assessment carried out by teachers in the classroom. It may be formative when teachers are collecting information about children's strengths and weakness in order to provide feedback to learners and to make further decision about teaching, or it may be summative, when teachers are collecting information at the end of a period of time, generally to report to others about children's progress. Summative assessment carried out by teachers may also inform their own teaching, if, for example the learners return to them in the following school year. Teachers have opportunities to adopt performance assessment in its widest sense in classroom, engaging children as active participants in assessment process. In classrooms there are many opportunities for assessment through language use tasks, when children are able to engage in language use in games, information gap, oral tasks, story writing, question -and -answer tasks related to literature, project work and so on. Assessment can be embedded in instruction design to achieve the curriculum objectives, and this enables teachers not only to check that learning is thinking place, but also to use the feedback they receive through assessment to support learning. In this way, assessment is able to become, for a large part of the teaching year, an essential part of teaching and learning, rather than separate process. (Mackay, P. Assessing young language learners, Cambridge University Press 2006).

Methodology – Data collection

The aim of this paper is to find out the balance between formative assessment and summative assessment, and what kind of assessment is the good one to assess students. The research methods and instruments that have been helpful while conducting this research paper are comparative and descriptive methods, also I used to have an interview with English teachers. This study collected data from teachers who work and teach English language in different schools of Prizren. The interviews question were designed in that way to elicit information about what type of assessment between formative and summative is beneficial to teaching and to assess their students. To all my interviewee, I explained in the beginning about whole process, the orientation of the questions, and the time needed approximately. Because, my research is mainly interviews, participants are not anonymous to me therefore protecting their privacy and holding in confidence what they share with me is the best policy.

Data analysis

Data collection and analysis of this study derived from teachers' interviews. A number of different interviews that are used gather information for a qualitative research. Before the interviews began, approximately all interviewee share the same opinion about the number of the students in a class which is more than thirty-six students and to monitor the development of such a large number of students is not easy.

What is assessment? and Why assessment is necessary?

In these questions about assessment and why assessment is necessary, all interviewed teachers have given the same opinion. Assessment is the way to measure the learning and teaching process. It refers to varieties of methods that teachers use to evaluate learning progress and learning acquisition. Assessment is a form of evaluation that gives teachers feedback on how much they have accomplished their goals and how much, have the students gained knowledge. Assessment is necessary because indicates the progress achieved. It is a key element of learning because it helps students to realize where they stand in terms of learning process and motivates them to learn more.

According to your teaching experience of students, summative and formative assessment, which kind of assessment do you think is good for language teaching and learning? Why ?

When, interviewed teachers were asked this question, more than half of them (14) choose formative assessment, because formative assessment is an ongoing activity, and the evaluation takes place during the learning process. Not just one time but several times. Its purpose is to monitor the learning process and to improve students' learning. It also covers little content areas, and last but not least, it considers evaluation as a process so the teacher can see a student grow and steer the student in an upwards direction. On the other hand the others (6) chose summative assessment. They think it is a better method than formative because two main methods of summative assessment, oral and written examination help to assess students directly and as they say correctly and through testing teachers can assess their students better. However the results of this research have shown that the teachers use the formative method

the most.

Could you explain the advantages and disadvantages of each assessment respectively?

According to the results of interviewed teachers, the disadvantages of summative assessment is that through exams students may cheat and summative assessment has to do with teachers initiated control tests and it is not focused in students' needs and strength, advantages of this method is, that is the easiest form to assess learners and to grade them, through the formal test in the end of term. On the other hand the disadvantages of formative assessment, is that requires more time and the results of students can be spontaneous and not planned by teachers. The advantage of this method is that teachers are not a centre of learning process but students, and it is the right way to assess students because the assessment is done for a longer period of time.

When you assess your students' learning, how many factors do you consider? What are they?

In this question the teachers mention, classroom engagement, classroom discussion, self-reflection, motivation, responsibility, think-pair-share, individual work (written and oral assignments), support at home, learning environment, etc.

Do you think assessing students with a test could reflect students' learning better than the other type of assessment? If yes give a reason. If no, please take one instance.

In this question teachers have given confusing answers. Some of them do not think that the test is the best tool to reflect better students' learning. It is just a tool to evaluate a certain type of language skill and not their best skills. Considering Visual, Audio, Kinesthetic, and Tactical (C.V.A.K.T.) method of learning, teacher can realize students' strength and evaluate them differently. Moreover, they do not think that testing only shows how much students have learned. On the other hand, there is a group of interviewed teachers that think a test assessment is the best way because through test teachers can assess their students directly and correctly.

Besides the testing, what are the other methods that can be used to gather information about the knowledge and performance of language learners? Please give example if possible.

Teachers' examples that were given according to this question, beside the testing, what are the other methods that can be used to gather information about knowledge and performance of language learners are: Student's portfolio, (where students prepare their tests lessons during a certain period and compile brief and effective summary to each piece of lesson), Student's self-reflection, (students should be allowed to express their reflection, actions, and behaviors toward each lesson. It helps students to feel a sense of autonomy throughout their learning processes, Posters sessions, (the goal of poster session is to help each student link the material learned with everyday life to understand the lesson in practical way and to strengthen their presentation skills.

What are the usual formats of the test that you have taken in your experience of English teaching?

According to the question the usual format of the tests can be written in various formats, including multiple choice, matching, true-false, short answers, short essays, etc. Also there is a group of teachers that combine two methods of assessment while assessing their students. During their experience as a teacher they used: Verbal tests (open-ended questions), Poster presentation (presentation skills), Group work (final product and each presentation skills), Individual work, Portfolio, etc.

Results

According to the extracted results we may assume that there are significant differences in application and understanding the importance of the formative and summative method of assessment. Even though, most of the teachers have confessed, to giving priority to the formative assessment there are a number of interviewed teachers that favored the summative assessment and its methods to assess students. Moreover, from the research we have seen that new generation of English teachers who work with, 1st to 5th grade students have started using forms of formative assessment. Low secondary school's teachers, especially English teachers with a long experience in teaching, and who work with students from 6th to 9th grade, they favored both methods, summative and formative assessment to assess their students. Another interesting point to be marked is, English teachers who work in secondary schools or pre-university schools. Teachers who work with 10th, 11th and 12th grade students are usually new generation of teachers and unfortunately, there are some teachers who belong to the old generation, and who still favored the oral and written examinations usually in form of test. These are teachers fortunately not many in number prefer to stick to their traditional ways of assessing, because formative and summative methods require more dedication then the traditional methods do. From this statement, we may sum up that English Teachers, who work in secondary schools use formative assessment with a little bit summative method included.

Conclusions

Through this research paper I wanted to draw attention to the importance of assessment as an integral part of teaching process and to emphasize the importance of the fact the teacher can extract the best of students, which is most easily accomplished by using the formative methods, aside from summative, which is seen from the results of the research. Formative assessment is a kind of assessment that requires a detailed plan and program for monitoring the development of student, individual differences of students, their development, taking evidence on their knowledge and overall progress. Formative method contributes to a clearest insight into student's knowledge, but also needs work on the implementation of this type of assessment. In order to achieve this, the number of students in class should be reduced, which would facilitate the individualization of teaching and learning process because to monitor the development of such large number of students is not easy. On the other hand, summative method is crowded-classes-friendly method where teachers find themselves in a familiar field. As we know summative assessment's main methods are the oral and written examination. Orally assessing students usually involves only a few students per class (five to six students get their grades in one class of assessing) and in developing assessment through test, teachers usually prepare several test groups or have two classes, where half of the class attends the test first and the other half attends the test next class. However according to extracted results we have seen that new generation of teachers, usually teachers who work with primary school's students have started using forms of formative assessment. Teachers that work in low

secondary school favored both, summative assessment and formative assessment, while teachers who work in secondary or pre-university schools, use formative assessment with a little bit summative included.

Appendix

Questionnaire for interviewing English teachers

1. What is assessment?

2. Why assessment is necessary?

3. According to your teaching experience of students, summative and formative assessment, which kind of assessment do you think is better for language teaching and learning? Why?

4. Could you explain the advantage and disadvantage of each assessment respectively?

5. When you assess your students' language learning how many factors do you consider? What are they?

6. Do you think assessing students with a test could reflect students learning better than the other type of assessment? If yeas, give a reason. If no, please take one instance.

7. Besides the testing, what are the other methods that can be used to gather information about the knowledge and performance of language learners? Please give examples if possible.

8. What are the usual formats of the tests that you have taken in your experience of English teaching?

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