

IT LEARNING EVALUATION: REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT:

Though evaluation is acknowledged universally to be an ongoing process used to grade and improve learning and teaching (Agrawal, 2004), ENS inquires student-teachers only twice a year to control their learning achievement and grade them to pass to higher levels.

The issue, I will deal with, is that, at the ENS of Bouzarea in general and in the English Department especially, in addition to the reduced number of testing known as “examinations”, the evaluation is mainly summative.

Thus, the object of my paper is to attempt to suggest:

1. a systematic process of inquiry made up of a series of techniques to be used along the continuum of students’ learning to determine what, how, how well they learn over time to capture their progress, (PL, Maki, 2004) and why to provide appropriate adjustments;
2. A process made up of a variety of sources to make students’ grades more accurately represent their ability using efficient tools to help educators be more objective.

In other words, with the suggestions of the variety of sources, on one hand, to guarantee objectivity in making student-teachers grades more representative of their actual ability, and the implementation of ongoing learning evaluation on the other hand, to guarantee improvements in learners’ outcome and teaching practices, we wish educators of the ENS, Bouzarea and particularly of English department could stop blaming learners for their poor levels and prepare them to be highly qualified middle and secondary school teachers who in turn provide better Algerian education.

Introduction

If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures, since what is valued and rewarded reflects the quality of the evaluation system of an institution. (D.Rowntree, 1987cited in PL,Maki,2004)

Thus, what student abilities and achievements are actively valued and rewarded in the initial teacher education school? How are intentions, hopes and expectations translated into goals professed by the various curricula realized? To what extent are aims and procedural objectives achieved by the different syllabuses? How are those objectives regarded by evaluation? Do educators take them into account in their test construction? What do English department

require student-teachers to do in order to be highly qualified middle and secondary school teachers?

The issue to deal with, in this paper, is how evaluation is regarded at the ENS and particularly at the English Department. Is the goal of evaluation to ameliorate (DL.Stufflebeam, 1980), demonstrate to what extent learners use the knowledge they acquired or rather to determine the quantity of knowledge they stored during a semester? Is there really a system of evaluation in this institution? Does it reflect the quality expected? What kinds of assessment are conducted? What is valued and rewarded? How are feedbacks and post test reports perceived by both sides: learners and teachers?

We will show how evaluation is important, to what extent it improves both student-teachers outcomes by providing appropriate constructive feedbacks and teaching practices by modifying strategies and adapting lessons to meet learners' needs leading to better outcome, consequently, to better initial teacher education.

Evaluation at the ENS: English Department

Evaluation is an effective means of measuring teaching and learning performances in a language program and of improving teaching process. It can be used to trace both teaching procedures and learning progress. (Xu.Yunian et al, 1999). However, evaluation at the ENS is reduced to two examinations, one each semester. It is a summative evaluation intended to rank students' level of achievement that generally does not go far beyond the pass mark, ten in the English department where it relies on rote recall of material as it was the case in the first normal schools (ER, Ducharme, 1993). The procedure used is that student-teachers have to rewrite the material taught since most of the tests provided lead examinees neither to reflection nor intelligent thinking. For instance:

- British civilization : exam subjects consist of repeating the course taught corresponding to the following questions :
 1. What is the link between the development of agriculture and the Industrial Revolution in GB?
 2. What are the main characteristics of the British population?
 3. What do you know about the British presence in India?

The same is required from them for Arabic contemporary literature.

- في مادة الأدب الحديث contemporary literature
- أرصد أهم عاملين تراهما في تطور الأدب العربي الحديث وازدهاره
- مبينا سبب اختيارك لهذين العاملين دون العوامل الأخرى.

- الكلاسيكية هي مذهب اتخذ الآراء الغالبة نماذج لإنتاجه. انتمي إليه عدد من

مشاهير أدباء العصر. ولئن احتفظ كل واحد منهم بمميزات شخصية الأدبية فقد تقيدوا جميعا خصائص مشتركة. نقش هذا الرأي في ضوء ما درست.

- Western Civilization examination.

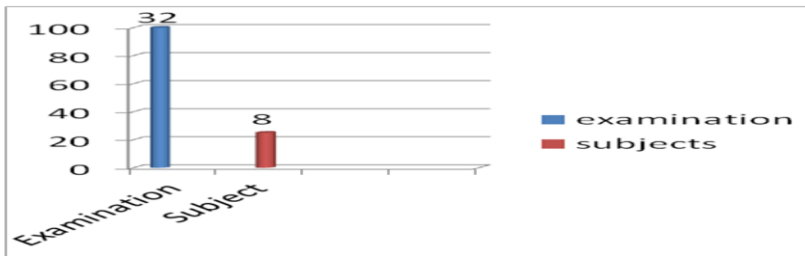
This exam is efficient since it requires students' acute observation, intelligent thinking, reflection and analysis.

Here the teacher suggests a picture taken from the book entitled *The Nuremberg Chronicle* that illustrates the history of the world, published in 1493 representing Noah building the ark. Here students are required to find one image out of time and order and to define it in the study of history and then to explain it.

Consequently, most of the tests are sorts of containers, receptacles, into which student-teachers deposit what they have rehearsed or hope they have done it well. Very often what they store in their short term memories and then deposit on a test vaporizes after they have completed the test unless of course they have future opportunities to build on that learning. (LP, Maki, 2004).

Only 8 subjects of examinations out of 32 analyzed that is 25% per cent of them require intelligent thinking and reflection that prospective teachers should use in addition to their acquirements to analyse a situation and draw conclusions.

Evaluation at the ENS, English Department



25 per cent of the 32 subjects designed to assess students are positive and require reflection and analysis

Why is evaluation an issue? Does it have an impact on students' learning, on teaching process?

Impact of Evaluation on Student-Teachers' Achievements

It is acknowledged that assessment and especially the formative one has shown to be effective in raising the level of students' achievement. The use of such evaluation according to a study carried out by OECD' Centre for Educational Research and

Innovation (CERI) improves students' retention of learning and of the quality of work. In addition to the raising level of students' attainments, it enhances equity of their outcomes (OECD, 1978). It becomes more effective when it is followed by helpful verbal and written feedbacks. The more the latter is constructive, the more efficient learning adjustments are.

In other words, feeding back learners suitably raises their learning achievement. However, to realize this enhancement, teachers need sufficient knowledge of the meaning of the assessment data, how to categorize them into knowledge, skills and performances to be able to make appropriate adjustments via revisions, more explanations or more verbal or/and written practice.

Literature shows that the first benefit of continuing assessment is to learners, so to be able to lead students profit from evaluation, educators should accept it as an integral part of the process and should explain to prospective teachers that ongoing assessment is not a punishment but a reward because of the positive impact it has on cognitive, effective and psychomotor domains since it helps students to

Cognitive	Affective	Psychomotor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize their weaknesses; • adjust & correct them; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise motivation & energy; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build learning strategies;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand better ; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enjoyment in learning; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build strategies of assessment;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for quality of knowledge through reflection and analysis; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop curiosity & interest in learning as much as possible; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop their ability to interact;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve their level of achievements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop observation, critical thinking, & analysis; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategies of research;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • think positively about evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalize the characteristics of quality work;
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • become independent learners.

Becoming independent learners is what teaching attempts practitioners to achieve in order to develop themselves professionally. How can this be possible?

With formative assessment learners' ability to assess one another and self assess their knowledge and their skills will increase. Both self and peer assessments are effective. Yet, the latter may be unfeasible in our large-size classes. Anyway, the initial experience was with grammar classes. As, it is student-teachers first year at the university, peer assessment was welcome in comparison with the resistance that changes usually engender. This type of assessment becomes possible with supportive learning environment, encouragement from the teacher to involve them in the process with clear explanation of what they are to look for, using concrete criteria permitting them to judge the quality of their peer's work. The use of criteria guarantees objectivity and equity. It is via peer assessment that students internalize the characteristics of quality work. This proves the strong evidence that students learn from peers' feedback (LP, Maki, 2004) since they better tolerate judgments and comments coming from one another. With peer-assessment, students feel comfortable when they start trusting one another.

With first year speaking classes, peer assessment was easier to conduct and more effective. During the first session, groups were inquired to construct dialogues in which they had to select to discuss

- about their first day at the university,
- About their choice to be teachers of English.

The performances took place in front of the class. Each prospective-teacher follows the dialogue with a checklist identifying the different parts of the dialogue. Attentively, they checked off the criteria noting down any missing element and possible grammatical mistake made. Everyone from the group feels comfortable and accepts classmate's comments and corrects what is reported to be wrong. As a result, most of student-teachers avoid repeating the mistakes already dealt with especially the famous "s" at the third singular person. Some of them frightened to forget it put it at the end of each verb used with the 3rd singular person, even with verbs like :

Though she was sick, Susan comes to school yesterday.

However, peer assessment is effective since it helps learners

- share with others;
- be tolerant;

- Work in community;
- Develop assessing strategies;

With appropriate assessment tools and efficient constructive feedback, this type of evaluation leads to better attainments.

With higher level classes, self assessment was more suitable because learners are adults then less tolerant. They accept neither to be judged nor corrected by peers.

Thus, the procedure of this assessment started with students' awareness of objective set at the beginning of the course: the purpose of the lesson to fulfill. In other words, objectives represent criteria to be used to measuring to what extent learners acquire the knowledge and progress.

For instance, dealing with the topic "syllabus", the objective was that "*At the end of the course they will be able to discriminate between a syllabus and a curriculum*". To demonstrate their understanding, learners had to define each tool describing the content or the components of each one of them.

It is evident that to self assessment corresponds self correction. This type of evaluation is efficient in a sense that it helps learners:

- build assessing strategies,
- improve their learning,
- develop skills for lifelong learning,
- become independent learners.

The data collected from these types peer and self assessments help improve teaching practice too.

Impact of Assessment on Teaching Process

The lack of definite recruitment conditions leads educators to find a procedure to assess the new recruits to have a clear view on their strengths and weaknesses to determine learners' real level to take it as a starting point to adapt their lessons. This technique for most educators of English department represents the usual preliminary contact in which students introduce themselves to the teacher and speak about their choice to be teacher and teacher of English especially. Then they interact about the syllabus of the subject they are going to attend. However some find this procedure inefficient and prefer conducting a diagnostic assessment which consists of series of written questions or activities on some grounding permitting them to determine their learners' needs.

The data collected may assist educators in programming, in relation to the curriculum, the knowledge that better meet their needs since assessment's effectiveness in improving learning depends on its relationship to curriculum and instruction.(NRC in PL,Maki,2004

Student-teachers themselves may participate to teaching improvement through their assessment of the sessions taking the form of messages in which they note whether they like the approach followed by the teacher, otherwise it should be reviewed to better achieve their expectations.

The succeeding assessment is another session assessment. Prospective-teachers are inquired to note what they appreciate most, what they liked, and what they did not like. In fact, they can add other comments if they want. Commentaries can help educators determine students' learning styles.

The subsequent assessment is a class activity consisting of a journal in which students note *what they have acquired and what they have difficulties to acquire*. In this case they have to discuss the problem to be solved in pairs, groups or in front of the class.

The other technique is called KLW chart it is a form of graphic organizer with three columns labeled what I know, what I learned and what I want to know.

What I Know	What I Learn	What I Want to Know
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The latter suggests in fact what they have missed, failed to understand, so what needs explanation, which can be brought by their mates, but if difficulties persist, the teacher intervenes, elicits through questions, then orders more practice to master the point. After such issues, the course is submitted to adjustments for the following classes who are supposed to deal with the same subject.

However, formal graded formative assessments are almost impossible because of lack of time and large-size classes even though it is approved of being effective in promoting the learning of teachers, and furthermore, in helping teachers

identify what they teach well and what requires a review or a new emphasis.(H.Temperly,2009)

Benefits of Ongoing Assessments

Ongoing assessments will be beneficial if both parts the teacher as well as learners start regarding these activities as a pivotal component of the curriculum and help each other in the process. Teachers should not only fulfill the objectives, but also find out their students' learning styles to vary their teaching procedures and strategies to improve the process. Ongoing evaluation is a systematic review of learning acquirements which needs the main types of assessments: formative and summative

Formative assessments, graded or ungraded, are intended to provide learners with information about their knowledge and skills to improve and supply teachers with data about strategies, approaches or some other element in teaching process to adjust and adapt to meet learners' needs.

Ungraded formative assessments may be systematic assessment classroom activities produced to control students' understanding, and to capture their progress. They may take the forms of

- questions,
- journals,
- quizzes,
- messages,
- Charts etc...

These activities do not take time since they are one-objective activities, short, rapid and simple to correct.

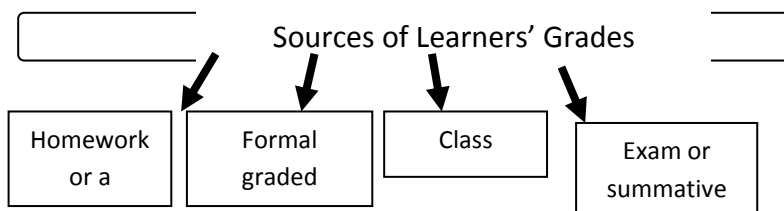
The graded formative assessments are useful since they are intended to test students on a unit or a file. Such tests should be formal then scheduled officially for instance to be carried out at the end of each month or at least each term after a certain quantity of knowledge. They should rely on definite objectives to achieve.

These objectives simplify both the construction of the questions and determination of the criteria of the rubric. The latter is beneficial since it guarantees objectivity and equity and moreover it facilitates grading.

This transparency, those facilities based on the use of definite objectives and a rubric raise learners' motivation leading to their outcome improvement. It's on the latter that educators' satisfaction is judged.

Sources of Grades

To get the accurate learners' ability and have an objective view on their learning styles, their strengths and weaknesses, teachers should use more than one source of information since human being learning is complex. Indeed, it is so complex that it differs from human being to human being and may even vary within each of our own selves depending on the nature of the task we face.(PL. Maki, 2004) Different students are good at different activities, because one doesn't fit all for adults need differentiated learning opportunities. (HG.Gayle 2002).Consequently they need differentiated assessing opportunities too. Thus, continuing assessments may solve such an issue. As a result, we suggest that student-teachers should be graded on different sources that can be :



Note that for class participation shy students will have difficulties. However, the best way to make them gain confidence is to propose pair work and peer assessment then encourage them to participate progressively until they involve perfectly and become active.

Conclusion

ongoing assessment is the most important means of measuring objectively students' learning over time and capturing their real ability. Educators should implement it in their teaching-learning process since the more we assess learners, the more we know about their strengths and their weaknesses, and the better we review and adjust to meet their needs.

To be more beneficial for learners as well as teachers, an institutional process of inquiry should be built and be used along the continuum of student-teachers learning relied on principles that educators should take into account to construct tests and exams using tools like check lists and rubrics to guarantee objectivity and equity leading to better initial teacher education and consequently to better Algerian education.

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