

Editorials: Using effective assessment to improve teaching and learning

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Why is assessment a crucial element in teaching and learning? Why must teachers adopt effective assessment strategies in their practice? Assessment is noted as an important variable in teaching and learning; it is used to understand the extent to which students understand/learn what is taught; teachers also use assessment outcomes to modify their teaching strategies to improve students learning. However, these may prove to be more complex in practice and require some informed strategies to achieve. For example, teachers' belief systems about assessment is likely to influence how they apply assessment in the classroom which would in turn influence the effect of assessment on students learning. Some assessment beliefs narrowly focus on 'testing' and students' grades/marks which is translated into assessing the extent to which students reproduce what is being taught. Other beliefs view assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process in which learning objectives, instructional strategies, student learning styles etc are linked to assessment – assessment focuses on the learner and learning process. Teacher beliefs and practice of assessment invariably influences students' learning. Hence, depending on how assessment is perceived and applied, it can be a process that can either enhance or impede student learning and achievement. Assessment for learning is one of the most recommended assessment strategies for effective student learning and achievement. In assessment for learning, teaching, learning and assessment are inextricably linked and focuses on the learner and learning. Assessment for learning is based on the assumption that learners use mental models that are complex and constructed from previous experiences to facilitate effective learning, hence assessment should emphasis on learners overall learning experience, use formative assessment and lots of meaningful and timely feedback to students. The opportunities in using assessment for learning includes developing strong and meaningful connection between learning, teaching and assessment; helps learners to focus on the

aims of learning rather than the ‘test’ or ‘grade’; provides direction to the teacher in decisions about instructional strategies and materials. Teachers should develop the right belief system and practices of assessment which are consistent with the assessment for learning strategy, they should also continuously examine what they do to ensure that their assessment practices promote effective student learning and achievement. The papers in this issue of the Journal of Researching Education Practice and Theory (JREPT) are case studies from practitioners that examines different forms of student assessments and their impact on students’ learning and achievement.

The first paper, entitled, ‘Undergraduate physiotherapy students’ performance in theoretical and practical examinations: A correlational case study in the UAE’, is an empirical study that aims to find out if there is any correlation between the theoretical and the practical examinations marks of first year physiotherapy students and to explore potential factors that contributes to any differences in exam performances in the two forms of examinations. Senthilnathan Ramakrishnan and Abdulai Abukari conclude that while there was moderate correlation between the examination marks for theoretical and the practical examinations, instructional strategies, learning styles and skills of the learners and assessment method were the main factors that had influence on the students’ performance in the written and practical examinations. The authors argue that assessment strategies should be relevant to the aims of learning, the learners and the teaching strategies in order to make learning more effective.

In the second paper, Hinda Jirdeh Hussein presents the findings from an experimental study that examined the impact of using Socrative as a tool for formative assessment “Feedforward” on EFL tertiary college students’ conceptual understanding of a nutrition course in the United Arab Emirates. The results showed a significant improvement in the performance of the group that used the Socrative formative assessment tool (experimental posttest group); the Socrative tool had an impact on students learning. Hussein argues that due to increased use of technology in classrooms, it is correspondingly becoming essential for practitioners and researchers to test and validate technologically based pedagogical practices.

Mina Radhwan, investigates the impact of applying different strategies of formative assessment practices on students’ learning outcomes in summative assessments in one of the private schools

in Sharjah, UAE in the third paper. Using a qualitative research approach, the research finding shows that substantial influence is achieved through using a variety of formative assessment practices on students' learning outcomes in the summative assessments. The study emphasis on the importance of formative assessment to achieve effective learning.

In the fourth paper, Aisha Hassan Alyammahi presents a research report that investigates the impact of implementation of a project in an 'all-girls' public school in the Abu Dhabi, UAE - the Alef platform and its effect on Al Asayel students' performance, confidence and motivation by measuring students' motivation, confidence, independent learning, and academic performance. Data from the research shows that in the first academic year of implementation of the Alef Platform at the School, there was positive impact on student motivation, student learning and student performance. The paper argues that it is essential for the school to continuously research and develop its assessment systems to make learning more effective and progressive.

References

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