

The Problems That Teachers Face In Applying Formative Assessment In The Classroom

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Abstract: In Bangladesh the system of assessment has always been guided by curriculum though the system only covered learners' ability of memorisation and comprehension skills. Others categories of skills in the knowledge like application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation are hardly included in the assessment. Besides, most of the schools don't follow formative assessment to develop students. This study is an attempt to explore the present situation of formative assessment and problems that teachers face in classroom by applying formative assessment. For data generation, teachers were interviewed followed by using interview guide, classroom and teachers' assessment process has been observed. The interviews with teachers were conducted in informal setting. The study identified teachers perception on formative assessment, usefulness and benefits of formative assessment for primary learners, problem encountered in implementing formative assessment, teachers training on formative assessment, suggestions about forms of assessment that encourage effective learning and about changes in the current practice of assessment.

INTRODUCTION:

In education assessment is the process by which one attempts to measure the quality of learning and teaching using various assessment techniques, assignments, projects, continuous assessment, objective type tests (Aggarwal, 1997). Assessment means collecting information about individual student's level of performance. Assessment also should consider the concepts of "assessment for learning", "assessment of learning" and "assessment as learning". It is a process of making judgement about the information (Partin, 2005). Two types of assessment are in practice in our country. One is summative and another is formative assessment. First one is designed to determine what students know at a specific point of time, usually at the end of a year. Second one assists teachers in making instructional decisions. Formative assessment is important to identify the students' area of development and take necessary actions for improvement. But formative assessment is a new concept in our present practice. I did not know enough about such kinds of assessment. So it was my interest of study to know about formative assessment elaborately. My Study was about the application of formative assessment: problems that teachers face in classroom. Teachers aren't interest to apply formative assessment in classroom. There is not enough research in this sector. I wanted to know why the teachers could not apply formative assessment in the class or why they didn't feel comfortable to apply formative assessment. I would try to identify what problems they face and how they can overcome that situation.

Statement of the problem:

Assessment for learning is formative assessment. Assessment for learning provides educational programs that enable pupils to reason and to think, not just to perform routine operations. Formative assessment is used to monitor learning progress during instruction. It provides continuous feedback to both teacher and student. Formative assessment depends heavily on specifically prepared tests and assessment for each segment of instruction (Linn & Gronlund, 2003, P 41). In our context teacher do not have clear concept about formative assessment. Inadequate training is the main cause to apply formative assessment in the class. In Bangladesh it is a great problem to apply formative assessment. There is a little work on this assessment. In reality, practice of

formative assessment is problematic. According to Gipps (1994), if the continuous assessment works but cannot add any mark value in the summative exam then it does not work accurately. Teachers and students lose their interest to apply formative assessment in the class.

Research Question:

Key question: How do teachers apply formative assessment in the classroom?

Sub questions:

- What concept do the teachers have about formative assessment?
- What are the current practices of formative assessment in the school?
- What are the difficulties the teacher face and what can be done to overcome those difficulties?

Significance of the study:

Many countries of the world are practicing formative assessment for the students and for this their achievement is extraordinary. But in Bangladesh it is a new concept. Summative assessment is institutionalised here. We are yet to achieve quality education. So I want to find out why our teachers cannot apply formative assessment in the classroom and also how to improve the overall situation. There are two types of assessment, summative assessment and formative assessment. So I am interested to know the application of formative assessment and problems of applying formative assessment in the classroom. The research finding may influence the policy level in decision making in primary education in Bangladesh. We are struggling to reduce the dropout rate, repetition rate and improve the quality of primary education in Bangladesh. I think this research findings may help to improve the educational situation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment

The principle aim of assessment is to help students go forward with effective learning. Thus the assessment practices are supposed to be designed in such a way that they are supportive of learning to students from a diversified background with a variety of learning styles. The

educational value of assessment lies in the participation of every student in proper learning process and the assessment results should accurately reflect a student's actual knowledge, understanding and skills of learning achievement. For effective learning the assessment process must be an integrated part of the teaching learning process (Harris, 1986). Assessment should consider the concept of "assessment of learning and assessment for learning". In order to understand the differences between assessment of learning and assessment for learning, the characteristics of both these two types of assessment need to be understood. In order to recognise these two types of assessment I discuss them below:

Assessment of Learning

Assessment of learning is called summative assessment. As mentioned by Black, assessments occur to inform an overall judgment of achievement, which may be needed for reporting and review, perhaps between transfer between years in a school, or transfer between school, or providing certificates at the end of schooling. The results may be used for judging the achievement of individual teachers or school as a whole (Black, 1999). Weaver found that, the most common form to assess students' performances in a course is through a final examination (Weaver, 2006). But critics to this kind of assessment are that students tend to only devote to surface learning when assessment system demands memorization (Nulden, 1998).

Assessment for Learning

Others have found that, in assessment for learning students' achievement is measured in terms of how much they have learnt, what their weaknesses and strengths are and how they can be helped to improve their learning. It is considered to be one of the most powerful educational tools for promoting effective learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999, p. 2). It is also known as formative assessment. The main purpose of assessment is and should be to support the teaching and learning process (Gipps, 1994). Learning takes place when students are able to make sense of what they learn and construct meaning and interpret it on the basis of their prior knowledge and experience through an active participation in the learning process. Assessment for learning recognises the influence that assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of students and provides them with constructive feedback. Assessment for learning encourages the active involvement of students in their learning and it depends on teachers' diagnostic skills to make it work (Earl, 2003). This assessment mainly is concerned to identify, what difficulties a student is having, when the difficulties occur, the reasons for the difficulties and how the difficulties can be overcome (Lewis & Freeman, 1998, p 32).

Problems using formative assessment

Implementation of formative assessment is problematic in classroom. According to Educational research News Letter, August 2007 has mentioned insufficient knowledge and understanding of teachers about the formative assessment is a problem for implementing formative assessment which I mentioned earlier. Teacher only focus on content knowledge and emphasis rote memorisation. For this

expected learning is not achieved. In formative assessment, meta-cognitive techniques are emphasized.

Research Approach and Data Analysis

A Qualitative approach has been used for collecting data for the study. Data was collected using methods such as face to face interviews, FGDs, and document reviewing as these are some useful methods of data collection mostly used in qualitative approach. For analyzing data, the approach was followed given by Rossman & Rallis (2003, p. 267-308). After finishing the data collection process, firstly the data has been re-arranged under some newly emerged categories. These categories were directly linked to the key questions. A very careful reading through the data was resulted into the emergence of different themes. After interpreting the data, data was categorized related to the answer of key questions. Finally thematic presentation of the data would be based on conceptual framework. This result will be presented in the discussion section.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Concept about formative assessment among teachers:

Some of the views were expressed by the teachers regarding formative assessment. Most of the interviewee teacher's concept was same. They felt that, when the students' have been assessed regularly and their learning needs identified and some action can be taken to develop them, then it is formative assessment. One teacher said that, "I assess student's everyday in every lesson, in this way I identified their learning needs and take necessary feedback to them. I think this is called formative assessment". One teacher also agreed that, "Formative assessment is provided during a course or while ending the lesson. In this way, I identify the weak learner then regular feedback is given. Our school has a provision of remedial assistance. For this child is developed with strong foundation". During observation I found that teacher assess students everyday in every lesson. Instant feedback was given in the class. If any student did not understand the lesson, teacher took necessary steps for that particular student.

Everyday practice through formative assessment:

From observation I found that, students' were well shaped by regular practice of formative assessment. One teacher stated that, "Formative means formation .A child is shaped in everyday, every lesson through assessment. When a child has been developed step by step, that is assessed by the teacher it is called formative assessment". Buhagiar, (2007) stated that students learning is best served when classroom assessment is guided by the teachers of assessment for learning.

How to apply different techniques of formative assessment:

From my observation and interview with teachers I found that teachers had no clear understanding about formative assessment. They do not know how to apply portfolio, what's the assessment rubrics, how to apply debate in class for specific content, what proper steps improve students quality etc. They mainly emphasize on regular class work, home work, class test, lesson ending test, feedback,

remedial assistance etc. They need more understanding about how to apply the techniques of formative assessment to improve the quality of teaching learning.

Training on formative assessment:

I found that teachers did not get any special training on formative assessment. But they got other kinds of training such as sub-cluster training; subject based training, school management training. In sub-cluster training AUEO demonstrated a lesson on how to assess students closely or formatively. There are training manuals in sub-cluster training. Each manual has some specific content, such as Developing children's writing skill, Asking question and answer, Teaching rhymes and poems joyfully, Teaching English by using structures etc. Most of the contents are related to teaching learning process, but few of them are related to assessment. In sub-cluster training there is a session on demonstration class-through this class teacher can identify the strengths of the session and also identify the weaknesses of the session. In this way whole session was diagnosed by teachers and AUEO. Partin, (2005) stated that formative assessment is diagnostic in that it provides relatively immediate feedback to teacher during the learning process. In this way they got the idea how to assess students. One teacher stated that, "I didn't get any training on formative assessment. But our primary education have some subject based training which has a subsection on formative assessment. Teachers got five days basic-in service training. After getting the training there was no follow up supervision about formative assessment in the school. For this teacher do not incorporate their learning in the classroom.

Current practices of formative assessment:

During observation I found that teachers were practicing some techniques to apply formative assessment in classroom. Testing knowledge from previous lesson: I found that teacher was testing knowledge of the previously delivered lessons. Usually they had done it before starting a new lesson. It seemed that the teachers used their assessment techniques to ensure students' learning on the one hand and on the other to their own responsibilities of learning. Looking over the document, I found that every teacher had specific whole year work plan. In that plan they included content of books and divided the lesson in many parts. Before going to the class they prepared lesson plan which was approved by the HT. Every lesson plan had some parts. One important part of the lesson plan was assessment. Students' involvement: Involvement of students in class work was a regular phenomenon. In each of the classes teacher had written the question on the white board. The question for class work had been selected from the exercise of the text book. Students were given time to complete their class test (CT). The teacher threw the question to the whole class. Those who know the answer of the question raise hand. In this way students were actively involved in class. By hearing the answer all students were learning equally. Then the teacher asked question again. In this process, teacher easily identified those students who did not raise their hand. Then teacher take necessary steps for the development of the specific student. Feedback to the students: It was found that teachers were familiar to give feedback to the students. The students submitted their

copies and teachers took those to the teachers' room and return them to students with feedback. Instant feedback was also given in the class. Two teachers simultaneously gave feedback to the students' in the classroom. When teacher gave some problem to solve to the class all students were ready to participate in the class. After some time, the students show their khata to the teacher. Then the teacher gave feedback instantly those who were unable to solve the problem. Student motivation: Teacher used some techniques to motivate the students'. Teacher praised students for their correct answer. 'Good' was the most commonly uttered word for praising. One extraordinary technique of praising was found in grade four by observation. The students those were given correct answer, the teacher drew some cartoons in the exercise khata. It seemed that students were very happy to get such kind of praising.

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